

Classic American Radio: A Listener's Guide

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Richard and Marcia. Thanks for all the encouragement, conversation, advice and tea.

Classic American Radio

The golden age of radio began on November 15, 1926 when the Radio Corporation of America launched the National Broadcasting Company. It lasted until someone added video to the audio and took all the old radio formats to the new medium of television. The end was a slow fade to black as television sets spread like a plague to every home in America. The exact date of the passing is hard to pinpoint, it may have been on October 15, 1951 when the world learned to love Lucy or possibly when radio's greatest funnyman, Jack Benny, said his goodbye to the medium on May 22, 1955. The final nail was driven into the coffin on September 30, 1962 with the last episode of the stalwart detective Johnny Dollar.

For three decades, through the great depression, the war against Hirohito and Hitler and into age of police actions and McCarthyism, radio entertained, informed and to some extent shaped America. It was the first mass medium that was freely shared by an entire nation. A working man not only heard the adventures of *Amos n Andy* but so did all his friends and they could chat about through the dull hours of work the next day. The working housewife could do the same with her neighbors as they listened to *Ma Perkins* together. This medium was a new force that could extend beyond the barriers of economics, race and distance to bind a nation together.

I chatted with an old soldier the other day. In his eighties now he remembered his favorite radio shows. Little Orphan Annie and then the Lone Ranger entertained him as he was growing up. Then he talked about going off to war, storming the beaches on D-Day, chasing the Nazis out of France, "I walked across all of France you know", and getting off his aching feet when he ferried officers about in a car during the Allied occupation. Through it all radio was a part of his life both as communication with superiors, "Our radio guy carried this big old box radio with him and he was shorter than me!", and as entertainment from the Armed Forces Radio Service, a slice of home to a soldier half a world away. Radio, along with the automobile, was the driving technological force of his youth and his America.

As radio grew and matured, the forms it pioneered became staples of broadcasting that are still used today. The serial and the soap opera kept millions in suspense waiting to see what would happen on the next installment. The sitcom with Jack Benny, Fibber and Molly and many more brought laughter that has echoed across the years through Bill Cosby and Jerry Seinfeld. Columbia Workshop and Lux Radio Theater defined drama, while Suspense and X minus 1 did the same for horror and science fiction. News and Sports where broadcast live for the first time. Each form found its legion of fans and to them their favorite programs became a focal point of their lives. It was a piece of life that had never existed before and would never cease to exist again, the shared experience of mass media.

A Listener's Guide

Most network programs during radio's golden age were broadcast live and were not ever officially recorded. Those that were recorded for networks or sponsors were often thrown away, locked away or given to the Library of Congress with strict orders to allow no duplication. So how come tens of thousands of classic radio programs still heard today? Because listeners fell in love with the programs and found ways to either record the shows or acquire original recordings that were slated for destruction or archive.

All the old time radio shows you can download from the internet, buy from distributors or listen to on oldies stations exist because someone cared enough to save that program. Some listeners put a microphone in front of their radio and recorded their favorite program every week. Other fans worked for radio stations or networks and made personal copies of shows they were supposed to be airing or archiving for their bosses or possibly just walked away with a syndicated program when they finished airing it. Some pulled transcription recordings from the trash when the fragile lacquer disks were tossed because they were taking up too much valuable storage space. There was no master plan to save old time radio, it was just a fan here and fan there saving what they loved so they could listen again and again to the shows they enjoyed.

Somewhere along the way these lovers of radio began to find each other and to trade programs. They copied each other's shows onto Ampex reel to reel tape and eventually formed trading clubs with hundreds and soon thousands of shows in circulation. With the advent of cassette tape trading became even easier and some folks came up with the idea to sell these wonderful programs so that anyone with the interest and five dollars could hear an old time radio show. A few syndicated shows like *Radio Yesteryear* that featured old time radio began to find homes on oldies and talk radio stations and the old art form was on the airwaves again.

Then came the internet and the MP3 and everything changed. Now radio fans could buy a CD with dozens of programs for five or ten dollars. In fact entire series like Fibber McGee and Molly or the Lone Ranger could be purchased for less than a Benjamin Franklin. Soon the costs plummeted to nothing for many shows as fans began to offer their collections for free through file sharing services like Napster and file hosts like Rapidshare and archive.org. With the MP3 revolution, a new generation of old time radio fans has been born and much of the old generation has been revitalized. As we move into the new millennium, thousands of classic radio programs are waiting to be enjoyed just as they were at radio's birth three quarters of a century ago.

This book is intended as a guide to the many classic radio series that are available on the internet. Whether represented by a single program or, like the *Lone Ranger* and *Suspense*, a show that counted its run by the decade, you will find a review of the series and information on where to find the shows for free on the internet if they are available. If there is no internet listing, the show can be purchased on disk or for download, see Appendix A for recommendations. The more famous shows are explored in depth with information about the series history, the show's stars and essays relating to some aspect of the program. But enough talk, dive into the book at the beginning with *Abbott and Costello* or jump to your favorite program and start reading.

Whether you are a long time fan who remembers the golden days of radio first hand or are just discovering these classics thanks to the MP3 revolution you should find interesting commentary on your favorite and probably a whole lot of radio programs you never knew existed. Of course since this is only volume one of the series fans of *X minus One* and *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar* may have a little waiting to do. Happy reading and more importantly happy listening.

Abbott and Costello

Costello: Who's on First?

Abbott: That's Right.

Costello: When you pay the first baseman every month, who gets the money?

Abbott: He does, every dollar.

This madcap comedy debuted on NBC in 1942 after Abbott and Costello had proved themselves as radio attractions on both *The Kate Smith Show* and *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* with Edgar Bergen. Their shows featured the pair's classic crosstalk routines, such as the famed *Who's on First*, and guest appearances by stars ranging from singer Frank Sinatra to actors Peter Lorre and Charles Laughton. The boys also included plenty of Hollywood glamour in the forms of actresses Veronica Lake, Marlene Dietrich and Jane Wyman. Abbott and Costello jumped to ABC in 1947 where they broadcast for several seasons; however the NBC years definitely showcase the boys' best work.

At their best, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello's radio shows are riotously funny listening. Costello managed to find trouble every week as he feuded with announcer Ken Niles and his wife, weekly guest stars and folks wandering down the street. He always ended up on the short end of the fight, but Abbott was always there to assist him. Usually the assistance involved taking Costello's money and sometimes his dignity, but Bud got even by steal Lou's sanity. The best moments usually included the boys' rapid fire wordplay that was honed from years on the stage. Whether they were looking for the Susquehanna Hat Company or chatting about how many dollars Bud owed Lou for a year's work, the pair left the audience in stitches. Abbott would try to explain the obvious which Lou would twist into some absurd reality. The jokes, puns and misunderstandings would fly at incredible speed for minutes on end, a sort of ping-pong comedy match between the two partners.

Much of the humor of the *Abbott and Costello Show* comes from listening to the comedic pair wander on and off the pages of their scripts. Perhaps because of their extensive headlining success on stage and the movies, Abbott and Costello seemed to feel much more relaxed with their scripts and performances than most of the other top comedians did. Costello would muff lines, adlib with impunity and occasionally complain that he couldn't make out a word in his script as Abbott struggled to keep his rotund partner on the page.

Roughly one hundred Abbott and Costello shows exist on MP3 with most coming from the boy's superior NBC days. Personal favorites will vary depending which guest stars and comedy routines you prefer, however here are some shows to sample.

Fans who love Lucy will enjoy the November 18th, 1943 show as the boys go looking for nylon stockings at a time when rationing for World War 2 had made them

almost impossible to find. Along the way they bump into not only the most famous lady in television history but also a certain Waskily Wabbit. Some wonderfully adlibbed moments late in the show illustrate the relaxed attitude the boys had toward their radio shows.

On March 4th, 1944, Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake guest starred as Blondie and Dagwood in a show where Dagwood manages to lose Abbott and Costello's script. Instead the four do a version of Snow White that gets Dagwood's blood boiling. Costello becomes intrigued with Dagwood's ability to race out doors and tries it himself with mixed results as the sound effects man has a ball.

Frank Sinatra was the guest on March 1st, 1945. In addition to a skit featuring the school daze of the boys, Frankie and Connie Hayes, this program showcases a duet for the ages as Costello tries to convince Sinatra that he's a singer too.

The boys go looking for the Andrew Sisters on the April 5th, 1945 show, but instead find the Andrews Brothers. Mel Blanc, Ken Niles and Will Osborne do a hilarious spoof of the famed trio. Finally on the April 26th show Abbott and Costello finally meet the real Andrews Sisters who are none too happy about the earlier spoof.

A (relatively) Brief Biography

Abbott and Costello were the last of the great two man comedy teams. They were trained and toughened in vaudeville and burlesque before becoming the clown princes of radio, film and television. It is impossible to imagine one without the other. Lou Costello was the rotund cutup wisecracking his way through every routine in what seemed like a half scripted, half adlibbed performance. Bud Abbott was the eternally dapper straight guy, tall and svelte, trying to steer the conversation back to something resembling normalcy as he tried to explain the obvious to the befuddled Lou.

Everything about the pair is classic Hollywood. The legend has it that they met when Lou's sidekick came down with the flu and Costello plucked Abbott out of the ticket seller's box to play straight man. In less than half a decade, they rocketed to the top of radio and film. After conquering both the airwaves and the silver screen, their careers started fading away. Not content with a one act life, they revived their comedic appeal opposite the Universal monsters and then again for television.

Their personal lives were just as close to the Hollywood story, but edging toward the painful side. Sometimes they were best of friends wandering through Hollywood arm in arm and sometimes they fought over billing, how the pay should be split, domestic staff and most anything else that made for good squabbling. The gossip columnists and even the FBI took glances in their direction, but it took the taxmen to lay them low. Either they had been cheating the IRS or the revenuers made an unfair example of the two, like so much about the boys it depends on who you ask.

Bud was the older of the two by a decade and when he met Lou, he was a thirty something family man who was a reasonable success. He apparently had a history of putting together burlesque shows and playing straight man for his wife, comedienne Betty Smith, and other stage funnymen.

Lou was a rising comic and funny enough to hold a crowd without resorting to the 'blue' material used by most comedians in that time and place. He had aspired to be a Hollywood actor, but never caught on. Thumbing his way home broke and hungry, he did

a turn as comedian to pay for some food and discovered his true talent. He eventually rose to the top burlesque palace, Minsky's of New York.

The most likely story about the origins of the comedy team has both men working at Eltinge Theatre in 1935 and performing together from time to time. Apparently their onstage chemistry was so good that the two became a fulltime team in the early month of 1936. After honing their act on stage, a 1938 Kate Smith Radio Hour appearance launched them into the big time. What was supposed to be one ten minute appearance on the show turned in to a two and a half year engagement.

The boys signed with Universal a year later and the film company gave them what were supposed to be small roles in *A Night in the Tropics*. The film crew laughed so hard at their small bits, that their roles in the film kept growing larger and larger. Apparently the director knew that he had a good team on his hands. Universal agreed and released *Buck Privates* in 1940. This first starring vehicle for the boys played to more paying customers than *Citizen Kane*. In desperate need of money, Universal worked the two at blistering amazing pace releasing four films in both 1941 and 1942.

The Abbott and Costello career in radio was moving along at a brisk clip as well. They stayed with the Kate Smith show until June of 1940 and then did a summer show as a replacement for part of Fred Allen's 90 minute show. After a break from the airwaves, the boys joined Edgar Bergen on the Chase and Sanborn Program on April 6, 1941. Their own classic show for Camel Cigarettes over NBC started in the fall of forty-two.

As one of the most acclaimed acts in both film and radio, the boys were at the peak of their career when the United States entered Word War Two. Attempting to give back to their country, Abbott and Costello embarked on tour of the country to raise money for the war effort. The tour was highly successful from a financial standpoint, but it led to personal tragedy. Lou Costello contracted the rheumatic fever. Costello was bed ridden for almost all of 1943, as the dread disease turned his powerful legs into "two useless sticks" as Lou related in the January 44 edition of Motion Picture Hollywood Magazine. The funny men went on to tell how partner Bud Abbott visited him daily to cheer him up and that Clarke Gable sent over his entire collection of sixteen millimeter films when he heard that Bud had a projector.

Lou recovered late in the year and his return to radio was scheduled for November fourth. The intended gala return was shattered when Lou's doctor pulled him aside a few hours before the broadcast to tell him that his young son Lou Jr. had just died in the family's pool. Mickey Rooney was called in to replace Lou, but Costello insisted that he would go on with the show. With Mickey standing in the wings ready to step in if needed, Lou laughed and joked his way through the entire show. The audience had no idea what had happened until the end of the program when Bud stepped forward and offered his condolences to his partner.

Life settled back into a familiar groove for the two stars as they turned out more films for Universal through the mid-forties and continued the radio show. This groove gradually became a rut as Abbott and Costello's routines began to grow stale. The boys tried to break new ground with *The Time of Their Lives* and *Little Giant*. These two films were more character driven than their previous work, but did poorly at the box office.

In late 1947, Abbott and Costello jumped radio networks to ABC and became the first major comedy show to be corporately sponsored. In the waning days of network radio, sponsors willing to underwrite a national show became harder to find, so shows

began to be sold regionally. A same show might feature commercials for a brewery for Milwaukee listeners, a Macy's Department store advertisement in the New York area and ads promoting gasoline for the entire west coast.

This corporate sponsorship of Abbott and Costello had an unexpected side effect. The powerful James Patrillo, head of the musicians union, forbade instrumental music on these types of shows and so the early programs for ABC featured an acapella group humming the background music.

Abbott and Costello also created a Saturday Morning kid show for ABC that had close ties to Costello's passion, the Lou Costello Jr. Youth foundation. This show was transcribed, pre-recorded, and aired at different times throughout the country.

The boy's movie career was revived in the waning months of 1948, when they meant some monsters. During the thirties Universal had been famous as the home of the monster movies. Frankenstein, Dracula, the Wolfman and others had prowled under the Universal banner to great public acclaim. Now the studio called the monsters out of retirement to co-star in *Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein*. At first glance an unlikely combination, the campy monsters gave Costello the perfect reason to use his wide eyed double takes and scared little boy routines. The success of this movie led to a series of Meet the Monsters movies that kept the boys careers going through the first half of the nineteen fifties.

In 1952, a new medium came calling. Just as Universal had been desperate for stars as the decade of the forties dawned, television was now frantically looking for big names to fill the seemingly endless broadcast hours. While breakfast shows, old westerns and wrestling could be counted on to fill much of the schedule, they were hardly high profile, audience drawing attractions.

Abbott and Costello were just what the network analyst ordered. With years of experience shooting popular films and broadcasting a weekly radio comedy show, the boys simply combined the two pursuits into a television sitcom. After dipping their toes into TV by hosting the *Colgate Comedy Hour* once a month, the boys started their own *Abbott and Costello Show* which became a huge hit for CBS TV.

By the mid-fifties the boys' careers started to wane. Their routines had been done and redone on a national stage for a decade and a half, their personal relationship was sometimes strained and Lou's health was becoming problematic. The final blow came in 1956, when the IRS came after the duo for back taxes. This forced Abbott and Costello to sell their luxurious homes and many other assets. Lou passed away in 1959 and Bud in 1974.

Abbott and Costello left behind a legacy of vaudeville style comedy that made them stars in three mediums. Their large catalog of films and two years in television captured the visual style of vaudeville for forthcoming generations, while their decade and more in radio captured their crosstalk routines for audiophiles.

The Guest Star

The guest star has always been a force in American broadcasting and he spans the entire spectrum of radio and television. In the earliest days of radio when there was no money budgeted for artists, a guest performer literally worked for the mention of their name and any business this might drummed up. Later the variety show relied on guest

stars to keep the public tuning in week after week, just as Leno, Letterman and lesser luminaries do to this day.

Sitcoms have varied widely in their use of the guest star.

Some comedies, especially those set in their own worlds far from mainstream Hollywood, used them on only the rarest occasions. *Fibber McGee and Molly* and the *Great Gildersleeve* rarely if ever used them. Glamorous actors would have been as out of place in Wistful Vista or Summerfield as Bing Crosby singing with the Metropolitan Opera Company.

Other comedians used show biz friends and recurring guest stars that fit their shows without straining the reality of the sitcom world. The classic example is Jack Benny. Jackson could schedule regular visits from his friends George Burns, with or without his wife Gracie, and Ronnie and Bonita Coleman on his shows along with occasional visits from Sinatra and Crosby without shattering the illusions of his show. After all, the Benny show was about Jack's fictional Hollywood life anyway so fictionalizing his real life friends into his radio show was a natural extension.

Finally some sitcoms used guest stars with no particular worries about reality or continuity. Possibly because of his show's original variety roots, Edgar Bergen tended toward a star or more a week, on her second television show, Lucille Ball did the same and the longest running sitcom of them all, *The Simpsons*, finds a good dozen guest stars a year drawn alongside America's favorite cartoon charters.

The Abbott and Costello show featured guest stars on almost a weekly basis during the early run of the show on radio. Part of this reliance on guests may have sprung from the boys' early roles on Edgar Bergen's *Chase and Sanborn hour* where they witnessed firsthand the value of a quality guest star. In later years they began to rely more on themselves and their crosstalk routines, which eventually led to their quick fade from television.

Abbott and Costello's radio sitcom oddly enough tends to fall into all three of the guest star categories mentioned earlier. This makes more sense when you consider that their sitcom was often divided into three phases. These phases tended to overlap and occur out of order, but generally all three can be spotted in a show.

The no guest star phase, the Abbott and Costello sketch, brooked little outside interference. These routines had been refined by the boys across many years in vaudeville and an outsider would have destroyed the lightning quick crosstalk vital to their success.

The guests we trust phase was the cast interaction. This is when the boys chatted with and Costello insulted Mr. and Mrs. Niles, Melonhead and others. Certain guests who the boys were comfortable with and who were comfortable with Abbott and Costello's cast would appear in this segment. Some like Artie Auerbrook's Mr. Kitzel made regular visits.

Finally came the actual guest star phase. The boys and their writers were wonderful about giving the guest star a scenario that fit their character and many of the show's best lines. Perhaps this is why so many of the top stars appeared. From Veronica Lake on the first show through the Andrews Sisters and Frank Sinatra, the boys welcomed a procession of the great and nearly great to the Abbott and Costello Show.

Vaudeville on the Radio

As vaudeville crashed against the rocks of cinema, many of its more comical passengers made the daring ascent to radio comedy. As the initial novelty wore off, these funny men made a startling discovery, radio consumed comedy routines at an astounding rate. Roving across the vaudeville circuit from city to city, a single routine could last a comedian for years. In radio a routine lasted for a single broadcast and another was needed for next week.

The solution was a tough one, find a brilliant comedy writer who could churn out a funny script every week. A fortunate few found someone who could manage this Herculean task. Those who couldn't generate fresh material faded quickly from radio never to be heard across the ether again.

Sometimes a writer was found through luck such as Marion and Jim Jordan's chance acquaintance with Don Quinn that eventually led to the creation of the Fibber McGee and Molly show. Sometimes it was through reference. When Jack Benny was still relying on old vaudeville writers for his scripts, his best friend George Burns suggested hiring Harry Conn. Conn helped create much of the Benny character and the ensemble sitcom.

Soon almost every radio comedian agreed that vaudeville routines were a relics of another medium. Two men disagreed; their names were Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. From their first teaming in the 1930s, it was obvious that the two had a unique chemistry and ability with wordplay. They quickly began to pillage the vintage routines of vaudeville and burlesque and make the skits their own. Since many of the skits came from the "baggy pants" routines and needed to be sharpened and cleaned up for radio, the boys generally found a writer to help them refine the skit.

The classic example is the legendary "Who's on First". Baseball skits had been standard comedic fodder for years on the comedy circuits. So Abbott and Costello used one in their act almost from the beginning using the names of famous baseball players. It wasn't until 1938, when writer Will Glickman was asked to fit the baseball routine for an appearance on radio that "Who's on First" as we love it today was born.

The common denominator in most of the boys sketch comedy was Crosstalk. This form of comedy has a long tradition dating all the way back to the Chinese style Xiangsheng that was birthed in the Ming dynasty. However it is likely that the Abbott and Costello routines owe more to The UK's Pat and Mike routines than to any oriental comedy. In the boys' version of Crosstalk, Bud would attempt to explain something that was both simple and simple to misunderstand to Lou. This often included a homonym such as the words ore and or in the Iron Ore sketch or the oddity of who being someone's last name as well as having a common meaning.

Eventually the boys had a couple dozen skits which ranged from "Niagara Falls" written at the dawn of vaudeville to newer routines penned by Hollywood scribes specifically for their movies. Since they generally rationed out one skit per show and included plenty of other materials and guest stars, Abbott and Costello managed to keep vaudeville alive on not only radio, but also television into the early 1950s.

Tidbits

Ralph Edwards' *This is your Life* gave a wonderful tribute to Lou Costello as the funnyman is joined on stage by his family and his longtime partner Bud Abbott. Many

friends from the past make cameo appearances including an entire basketball team that Lou played with in his youth. This show is available on DVD and the same disk includes a rare Laurel and Hardy television appearance.

Speaking of DVDs, both seasons of the Abbott and Costello Television show are available as are many of the boys' movies. Universal's *Best of Abbott and Costello* is a four volume set that includes thirty movies from *Buck Privates* through the duo's monster movies.

According to abbottandcostello.net/, the official Abbott and Costello website, "Lou Costello's famous high-pitched squeal "I'm a b-a-a-a-d Boy!" came from one of his grade-school teachers, Mrs. Bessie Whitehead, who made him write the phrase on the blackboard one hundred times."

users.tns.net/~forsbergweb/ is a website devoted to the boys that features an excellent Abbott and Costello radio log and an MP3 recording of Who's on First.

The boys' radio shows can be downloaded at theabbottandcostelloshows.googlepages.com/ or streamed from otr.net/?p=abco.

The Adventures of the Abbotts

Jean Abbot: After all if your husband is chasing a murderer it doesn't look very nice for him to have his face smeared with lipstick now does it, especially if it's another woman's lipstick?

The detective team of Pat and Jean Abbott was created by Frances Crane in the 1941 book *The Turquoise Shop*. The globe-trotting couple had a successful run through twenty six novels and made two brief radio appearances as summer replacement shows.

Abbott Mysteries appeared on Mutual in the mid-forties. Unfortunately these shows, as with so much of old time radio, have been lost if they were ever recorded in the first place. *The Adventures of the Abbotts* from the summer 1955 fared better. For years only one episode of the Abbotts was thought to exist, but in recent times all the episodes of the thirteen week run were found preserved from Armed Forces Radio transcriptions. At least the first two books are also available from Rue Morgue Press.

The Adventures of the Abbotts stars Claudia Morgan and Les Damon as a husband and wife detective team based out of San Francisco. Mr. Abbott was always trying to keep his wife from getting involved in 'this case', but to no avail. This was probably a good thing, as his better half made an excellent Watson for the detective.

While this relaxed mix of crime and romance may never have ranked with the best detective shows, its light touch and quick moving plotlines will entertain mystery fans. Most of the episodes have a similar feel so simply pick your favorite title and enjoy an evening of mystery in San Francisco. If you enjoy the Abbotts, try the hardboiled *Thin Man* or the comedy tinged *Mr. and Mrs. North*. The excellent *Radio Detective Story Hour* podcast features the Abbotts in Episode 22. You can find this broadcast and over a hundred more detective shows at

podango.com/podcast/546/Radio_Detective_Story_Hour . More episodes can be found at archive.org/details/Adventures_Of_The_Abbotts .

ABC Mystery Theater

Lawrence Olivier: He died after all. Was it murder and suicide or murder and accidental death?

Announcer: A shuffle of the cards and then they were dealt out and if you draw the wrong card... Mmm, it gives me the shivers...

Lacking only the creaking door to remind you of a more famous mystery / horror radio show, this half hour program which ran in the late fifties on ABC was designed to raise at least a few of the hairs on the back of your neck. Don Dowd hosted the program which was also known as Mystery Time and Masters of Mystery and usually featured classic stories of crime touched by horror.

Existing episodes often feature major stars such as Sir Laurence Olivier and Michael Redgrave. Only a baker's dozen of these shows exist and those that do are not of the best audio quality. Still if you love Suspense, tracking down Mystery Theater is worth your while as the classics are well adapted and the guest stars turn in generally memorable performances. Some of the more interesting programs include Sir Ralph Richardson's star turn in the classic tale *My Adventure in Norfolk* which will guarantee interesting dreams if enjoyed before bedtime and a visit to Robert Lewis Stevenson's *Suicide Club* starting Lawrence Olivier. Googling the show's title should bring up several free mp3s and podcasts though the listed addresses aren't always functional. Still a bit of persistence should bring you a free sample program or two of Mystery Theater.

Abe Burrows Show

For a while I kept body and soul together by helping to write *Duffy's Tavern* for Ed Gardner. (Starts playing the *Duffy's Tavern* theme song). Somebody spilled beer in the piano... I guess Gardner taught me just about everything I know about radio. You know that could be considered an insult...

Abe Burrows was best known as a Broadway writer and director. He won the Pulitzer Prize and several Tony Awards for *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. His radio ties go back to 1941 when he helped Ed Gardner create *Duffy's Tavern*. He was Ed's head writer until 1945 and said that writing *Duffy's Tavern* helped him fashion the streetwise New Yorkers that appeared in his novel *Guys and Dolls*.

Oddly none of this radio writing experience helped Abe to get his own radio show. It was his popularity entertaining at Hollywood parties with self effacing humor and satirical songs that launched a nightclub career which in turn put him on the air for CBS in the late forties. His fifteen minute shows were a mixture of patter and amusing songs that sounded like the listener was sitting in on one Abe's performances at a party in Tinseltown. In some ways his style resembles that of Victor Borge sans the accent.

While interesting for old time radio fans, The Abe Burrows Show sounds a bit quaint by modern standards. The highlight is from the October 24th, 1947 show when Abe talks about his history with Ed Gardner and *Duffy's Tavern* and then sings Archie's love song, *Leave Us Face it We're in Love*. All four episodes of the show that are known to exist can be found at archive.org/details/PublicDomainTheAbeBurrowsShow.

Abie's Irish Rose

Papa Levy: I don't want his money, he offered to me as much as I needed.

Rosemary: Why wouldn't you take it, Papa?

Patrick Murphy: He didn't take it because... because he's a shtuckle.

Papa Levy: Who's a smuckle? I didn't refuse the money because I'm a smuckle!

Not many soap operas had the pedigree of Abie's Irish Rose. The play by Ann Nichols ran for over five years on Broadway and was twice converted into film, first in 1928 and again in 1946. While never popular with the critics, Abie's Irish Rose in its various forms with its romantic story of forbidden love and reconciliation was a hit with the unwashed, and a fair number of the washed, masses. The same could be said of most radio soap operas, so a radio version of Abie's Irish Rose was a natural fit.

Actually calling the show a soap opera is a bit unfair, it aired Saturday evenings at eight on NBC and according to Time Magazine had an audience of five million. However just as later television serials like Dallas and Dynasty were still really just soaps in high profile timeslots, so Abie's Irish Rose sounds like a well connected soap opera broadcast in primetime.

Only two episodes of Abie's are known to exist and both sound like fairly standard soap opera material but with an extra dash of humor and a strong Jewish accent. Both of the surviving shows rely on the heavy accents for laughs and revolve around business problems and mild culture clashes. An interesting trivia note about the show is that Abie was portrayed at different points by the future Captain Video, Richard Coogan, and by the voice of Superman, Bud Collyer, though neither actor probably included the fact on his resume.

Abroad with the Lockharts

Mr. Lockhart: Only New England farmers talk through their nose.

English Girl: And it's only Cockneys that drop their 'h's.

Mr. Lockhart: Well now we've learned something.

English Girl: I'm glad you have!

In the mid nineteen twenties radio was beginning to blossom but broadcasting was often sporadic. Many radio stations kept informal and limited hours; they might sign on for a few hours in the morning and then return with a couple more hours of entertainment at night. With the rise of network broadcasting in 1927 and the enormous surge in sale of radios, many stations began to expand their broadcasting hours as the twenties drew to a close. Soon many radio stations were broadcasting from sunrise until the deep hours of the night. With sixteen or even eighteen hour broadcast days that had to be filled a new business was born, radio syndication.

Enterprising businessmen following the lead of the phenomenally successful syndication of WMAQ's *Amos n Andy Show* in 1928 began to create radio shows and release them on records to radio stations across the country. Musical programs and Amos

n Andy imitators dominated early syndication, but by 1932 many original serials began to appear on the airwaves. Many of these programs dealt in exotic adventures such as those of Chandu and Omar or travel like *Ann of the Airlines*.

One of these 1932 serials took travel and adventure in a different direction. *Abroad with the Lockharts* features a married couple visiting Europe. Will is the typical American tourist who believes that everything is better in America and subscribes to the stereotypes about Europeans. As he is dragged across the continent by his strong willed wife, he is disabused of these notions and has an enjoyable time often against his will. The show has the hallmarks of an early husband-wife sitcom. Much of the program revolves around Mrs. Lockharts' attempts to educate her unwilling husband on culture and his wisecracks about these wifely efforts.

Nine of the original thirteen broadcasts in this serial still exist. The most interesting are shows four through seven where the couple tours England and France. The Wonderful World of Old Time Radio, oldtimeradio-in-tx.homedns.org/menu.html, has streaming versions of all nine *Abroad with the Lockharts* and hundreds of other programs available for free.

Contrary to popular belief, These Lockharts are not the Gene and Kathleen Lockhart of film and stage fame, though they did appear in a radio series called *Sunday Night at Nine* according to a biography on IMBD.com. The similarity of names appears to be merely a coincidence.

Academy Award Theater

Humphrey Bogart: My files on the case of the Maltese Falcon are closed, but I've got the Maltese Falcon. I got it and some dough. My partner got murdered and a very slick chick went up for life. I'll tell you about it... (Theme music up)

This program was a glamorous showcase for pharmaceutical giant the E.R. Squibb company and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Each week at least one actor who had been nominated for or won an Oscar would appear on the program and the stars did appear. Betty Davis, Humphrey Bogart, Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart and many more put in appearances on the half hour show. Production values were high, the show had star power and the Academy Award name so why did it only last one year?

Money was one factor, the show cost Squibb on the order of a quarter million dollars for that single 39 episode run. According to John Dunning's definitive Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio, *On the Air*, the Academy was paid \$1,600 a show in licensing fees while the award winning talent cost up to \$4,000 an episode. Add in studio and agency fees and the costs of the non-starring talent like director Dee Englebach and writer Frank Wilson and the show became a very expensive proposition.

Another reason was the half hour runtime, if *Lux Radio Theater* is the *Reader's Digest* condensed version of movies then the thirty minute *Academy Award Theater* is the *Cliff Notes* version. The adaptations usually begin by summarizing the entire first half of the movie and then plunging into the meat of the story. For those who preferred their dramatic meal as an entree only, devoid of appetizer, dessert and a cup of tea, this

program must have been a pleasure. But most probably wanted a richer, better written movie adaptations of the hour long Lux.

From the opening show featuring Bette Davis in *Jezebel* to the series' bow with Margaret O'Brian in *Lost Angel*, there are a galaxy of star turns in the 39 episodes of Academy Award Theater. The easiest way to enjoy the series is simply to pick your favorite star or movie. If you like Disney, Snow White and Pinocchio will catch your ear. Did you enjoy Ronald Coleman in the movies and on the Jack Benny show and want to hear him in *Lost Horizon* or *If I were King*? You'll find both of them here. How much you enjoy the shows will depend on your preferences, personally I think *Lux Radio Theater* did fuller and more interesting movie adaptations, but there is something to be said for the faster paced *Academy Award Theater*. All thirty nine episodes can be found at the fine archive.org site at

archive.org/details/OTRR_Academy_Award_Theater_Singles.

Academy Awards

George Jessel: I see the great character actor Mr. Charles Colburn. Can we get him here? Charlie! No he's gone in he's too nervous. (Adlibs for several minutes) And here's Charlie now. Say a couple of word on the radio, Charlie.

Charles Colburn: Good Evening, Ladies and Gentleman. That's a couple of words. Thank you. (Charles Colburn leaves.)

The Oscars have always made for great broadcasting as all the stars come out to hope for one of the few things they cannot buy and everyone has their favorite film and actors to root for. By the second Academy Award show, radio had gotten in on the act. A local station broadcast the sophomore Oscar ceremony in 1930. The networks picked up the awards in 1943 and have broadcast the ceremony live ever since.

The award shows from 43, 45 and 49 are all available to old time radio enthusiasts. Of these the 1943 broadcast is the most interesting since it features Georgie Jessel as master of ceremonies for the pre-show over KFWB, the Warner Brothers station. The showman adlibs his way through twenty five minutes with plenty of snide comments for KFWB's Hollywood audience. There is also a musical medley of nominated tunes and brief interviews with Jack Warner and Jo E Brown as Jessel waits for the head of the Academy who proves to be a no-show. The second half features the ceremony with announcer Ken Carpenter and host, Jack Benny. Compared to the glacial pace of modern awards shows, the brevity of the ceremony is amazing as the entire awards bit is over in less than half an hour.

Ace Williams

Airplane Pilot: It's the fuel line, the engine is almost dry.

Ace Williams: It must be clogged up and the reserve gas can't get through either.

Pilot: Take the controls, Monsieur, I'll climb out on the wing.

Ace: I can't fly a kite, let alone a sea plane.

Dick: I'll do it, Ace.

The Adventures of Ace Williams features not unexpectedly Ace Williams, an English cameraman, and his young sidekick Dick. Their goal is to thwart the Tunis Terror which has plans of darkest criminal intent including world domination.

Only two episodes of this juvenile serial exist, but it appears to have been a typical syndicated adventure show. The first two minutes and the last minute of each show is theme music fill that syndicated programs often included to give the local announcer something to plug the sponsoring product over.

As with many juvenile serials, premiums were offered through at least some of the regional sponsors. Gasoline Alley Antiques has a picture of an Adventures of Ace Williams Holsum Observer Badge on its website. The badge features Ace holding his camera and presumably was a premium from Arizona's Holsum bakeries for loyal listeners in the southwest.

Action

Mike (on the phone): No... Oh no!

Doris: Mike it was Jimmy?

Mike: Over a bank, the truck got loose. I don't know what too...

Doris: Don't touch me. It was your run you killed him!

The title says it all. This was to be a blood and thunder adventure series on NBC in 1945, but it never got past the audition phase. Presumably the goal was to create an anthology series rather like *Suspense* that dealt with fast paced action. The first and only show is an adaptation of *High Explosive*, the 1943 Paramount film. Actor Robert Lowery, Batman in a 1949 Columbia serial, and the versatile Jane Wyatt, *Lost Horizon*, added some Hollywood star power to the program. The show is a decent listen for action-adventure fans, but certainly nothing outstanding or novel.

Action 80

Linden and I went to the BOQ, changed clothes and joined Admiral Caruthers for dinner. Linden reported and I listened. If there was sabotage aboard the atomic sub it had kept itself well hidden. Everybody was pleased.

This is another series that never appears to have made it past the pilot stage. The sole surviving show tells the story of the first atomic submarine Navy Commander Mark Richards who is assigned to guard against sabotage. William Conrad of *Gunsmoke* fame plays the lead. While the acting is solid, the plot holds up about as well as old science fiction novels about moon landings. This story has later remade for *Suspense* as *Report on the X-915* in 1955.

Adventures with Admiral Byrd

Admiral Byrd: Greetings adventurers young and old.

One of the most famed adventurers of our time, Admiral Byrd broadcast live from the South Pole from 1933 to 1935. The program was short waved to Buenos Aires and then to New York where it was broadcast by CBS for Grape Nuts Flakes as *The Adventures of Admiral Byrd*. Unfortunately the one broadcast that is available in old time radio circles called *Adventures of Admiral Byrd* is really *Adventures with Admiral Byrd* and was not a broadcast from Antarctica at all.

The existing program is introduced by the Admiral and he mentions 1939 or 40 mailbag broadcasts from NBC in which the men in his expedition were read letters from home. The show revolves around one of the men receiving a love letter from an admirer much to his chagrin. Presumably this show was syndicated and relied on the Admiral's fame for sales. The main appeal of the show is hearing Byrd's voice in the brief introduction.

Adopted Daughter

Jeri (on the phone): You've just got to come by so I can show you something.

Mike (trying to work): Honey I'm busy right now.

Jeri: I know but it's the sweetest thing you ever saw from Jenny in New York. She sent me a dainty little handkerchief with her picture in the middle of it.

Not much is known about this soap opera and for good reason, it was dreadful. Jettabee Ann Hopkins created and starred in this daytime serial which was carried over NBC in the late thirties and early forties according to SpartaOTR.com. A would-be Irna Phillips or Elaine Carrington star writers of soap opera, Hopkins worked for WOW in Omaha where she apparently started writing *Adopted Daughter Jeannie*, the show was shortened to *Adopted Daughter* when it was picked up by the network and sponsored by J.C. Penney. Several episodes are known to exist though only one is in general circulation.

Adventures by Morse

If you like high adventure, come with me. If you like the stealth of intrigue, come with me. If you like blood and thunder (long peal of thunder), come with me.

Carlton Morse was one of the great creative forces in old time radio. He is best known as the creator of *One Man's Family*, one of the greatest and the longest running serial dramas on radio. This family drama staring J. Anthony Smythe as family patriarch, Henry Barbour, ran for 27 years from the earliest days of radio in 1932 to classic radio's end in 1959.

However Carlton Morse had another side to his personality, besides being the best writer of what in lesser hands was the soap opera, he loved penning tales of mystery and adventure. So it was only natural that he would create a radio serial radically different than *One Man's Family*, to allow this darker side to emerge. The result was *I Love a Mystery*, often shortened to ILAM, with the dynamic trio of Jack, Doc and Reggie trotting the globe in search of adventure. Actually this was not his first venture into the adventure serial as he had written for *NBC Mystery Serial* before his great success with

One Man's Family. I sometimes suspect that as much as he enjoyed the astounding success of his family drama, he found writing what he called his the blood and thunder style much more interesting than penning the chronicles of the Barbour family.

I Love a Mystery bounced across the networks from 1939 until 1944 and was later picked up by mutual in 49 where the old scripts were dusted off and the series ran for three years. Carlton wasn't done with what he called his blood and thunder serials, after ILAM was cancelled by CBS in 44. He immediately began writing and producing a syndicated show called *Adventures by Morse*. His vast cannon of previously written serials served him well once again, as many of his *Adventures by Morse* scripts were light rewrites of his now two decade old *NBC Mystery Serial* scripts and the characters in his new show bore more than a passing resemblance to his ILAM crew.

New or recycled his latest show was a darkly thrilling journey into worlds of mystery and intrigue. It only lasted a year, however we are fortunate that the entire 52 episode run, along with two audition shows, is still available for our listening pleasure. The shows are well scripted, directed and acted. Fans of Carlton Morse adventure stories and ILAM will definitely enjoy them. Those who have never listened to Morse' blood and thunder style should probably start with *I Love a Mystery* first as it is his best work in the genre. As is often the case, the Old Time Radio Researcher's Group's compilation at archive.org is the best available free collection of this show. Find it at

archive.org/details/OTRR_Certified_Adventures_By_Morse_Ver_1.

Adventure Ahead

Adventure Ahead. The National Broadcasting Company presents another of the famous stories for the young of all ages. Adventure Ahead!

With these words another Saturday morning educational program began. Subtitled, Famous Stories for Young People, *Adventure Ahead* did an adequate job of loosely adapting classic books for American youth. The NBC series featured a full cast and solid sounds effects, but the performances seem stilted and bored as if the actors were waiting for something better to come along, but needed to eat in the meantime.

Eleven episodes from the Autumn of 1994 are available. *Two Years Before the Mast* and *Robinson Crusoe* are the most familiar titles, but September 30's *Biscuit Eater* is probably the best with a solid adaptation and some heartfelt youthful acting.

Adventure Parade

This quarter hour show probably had the most popular closing theme on the Mutual network. You see the closing strains of *Adventure Parade* meant ol' faster than a speeding bullet was about to whiz into view. It preceded *Superman*, *Captain Midnight* and *Tom Mix* on the Mutual schedule. While the program was by no means poor, its mix of classic literature like *Moby Dick* and *Bells of Liden Sing* told across five fifteen installments each week couldn't compete with the excitement to follow.

John Drake was the storyteller and handled all the voices. How well he did will be a mystery for the ages as only two shows still exist and they both have a background hum that almost obscures Mr. Drake's melodious tones.

Adventure Trail and Adventures Trails

Reading from a letter: I've just run across a clue to a rich silver mine. It's called the mine of the Parrot, how about helping me come down and locate the strike.

Thanks to extensive scholarship by old time radio enthusiasts almost all of the programs you can find through any OTR trading club, internet site or vendor have a story attached to them. Details about their history, lead actors, time slots and networks are all available. However some shows are almost complete mysteries. If you guessed that I'm telling you this because *Adventure Trail* and *Adventure Trails* are two of these mystery shows then you are probably one of those bright boys or girls that the shows were aimed at. I've lumped the two together because their stories are very similar. Both were auditions aimed at the juvenile market and if either show made it to a full series, time has obliterated any further evidence of their existence. The serial *Adventure Trails* is the more interesting of the two because it uses a several member cast while *Adventure Trail* is simply a story narrated by the Adventure Man. As with most audition pieces they serve mostly as curiosities.

Adventure, Inc

Before them reared a giant milk white cobra poised to strike. The beady eyes gleamed malevolently at the humans who had disturbed his lair.

The one available program, likely an audition, reveals a series drawn straight from the pulps and actors who have mild difficulty with the English language. The show is dated from 1948, but it would have sounded at home in one of the mid-thirties serials. With the idea of a corporation looking for adventure and a three man team, the plan may have been to make an *I Love a Mystery* clone.

What does make *Adventure, Inc.* unique is one of its actors. Marine Fighter Ace and Medal of Honor winner Pappy Boyington was a genuine American hero. He shot down 28 enemy planes, the most by any WW2 marine pilot, before being shot down himself. After twenty torturous months in a Japanese POW camps he was released at the end of the war on August 28, 1945. As a man who tried a little bit of everything from writing a best selling autobiography to guest refereeing wrestling matches, its no surprise that Boyington would give radio a try. It is a bit of a surprise that he wasn't a success in the medium. In the waning days of radio, a real war hero would have been excellent material for any of the networks publicity machines. Perhaps this somewhat creaky adventure program was just too weak a vehicle to spawn radio's version of Audie Murphy.

While *Adventure, Inc.* appears to have failed as a radio series, Boyington had better luck with television. His book *Baa Baa, Black Sheep* inspired an NBC series by the same title that debuted in 1976. Robert Conrad played the rough and tumble Pappy for two seasons on network television.

Adventures in Research

What kind of lights are those?

Florescent lights my boy, fluorescent. You'll have them in your home someday.
Ah never happen, they're ok for carnivals..., but who would want them at home?

One of the finest educational programs ever aired, *Adventures in Research* dramatized great moments in scientific history in less than fifteen minutes. Westinghouse hit on the program as a clever mix of public service and promotion for its own goals of science for the masses.

Given the sometimes poor production quality of educational type shows, it's nice to note the excellent quality of AIR. Westinghouse cared about the program and it shows. KDKA's Paul Shannon, who hosted the show for its entire run, offers a smooth informative introduction the day's topic, and then narrates as the drama begins. While the cast is anonymous, you will begin to recognize certain voices as you listen to several episodes. The talent was probably drawn largely from KDKA where *Adventures in Research* was produced, though local stage or voice actors may have been brought in as needed. At any rate the actors do a solid job and the shows manage the neat trick of being both good entertainment and solid education. Since the show is educational, the sponsor is only lightly mentioned and about thirteen minutes of each fourteen and a half minute show is devoted to the matter at hand. It's a welcome relief from the serials that seem to split commercial message and entertainment 50/50. Yes, Little Orphan Annie we are looking at you!

AIR was very successful for a public service program; it lasted from 1942 through 1955 as a weekly program amassing a run of over 600 individual shows, according to an excellent radio log by Shawn Wells. Westinghouse' own spokesman and sometime research scientist Dr. Phillips Thomas apparently scripted the show for most of its run.

AIR covers inventions from ice cream to dynamite along with medical and electrical advances, so there should be someone for most everyone in this series. Home schoolers and anyone with an interest in learning or teaching about science can make an entire course of the eighty or so available shows. It should be noted that a few of the shows strayed from the great moment in scientific history format into more promotional pieces about electronics in various industries and the future of power. While passable on the education side, these aren't as interesting as the other shows in the series.

otrpages.googlepages.com/ has dozens of *Adventures of Research Programs* along with many other Old Time Radio shows.

Imagine

Imagine a home without electricity. Imagine nights dimly lit by candles and gas light. Imagine that fastest way to send a message was a trip to the telegraph office. Through the miracle of the wire you could have a brief message sent across entire states.

Now imagine the electric wires being run to your house. "Be careful, this alternating current is dangerous, Mr. Edison says so himself," the foreman of the crew tells you. Suddenly this new miracle of technology brings light at the flick of a switch and a new phone that lets you talk to friends and relatives across town and briefly, for it was expensive, across entire states.

After you begin to take all this for granted, a new miracle hovers on the horizon. You have a slightly freakish friend who has played with his radio toys for years and you have even heard voices through the ether crackling into bulky headphones in his garage. Suddenly he gives you an excited call, radio is really here; they are making a whole radio network across much of the country. Music from New York will come right into your house, maybe the Metropolitan Opera, and shows like that Amos 'n Andy show we've heard so much about from Chicago. The possibilities are endless.

And he is right. Thanks to science the world itself is changing. Automobiles grant personal mobility, medicine gives hope of long and healthy lives while radio promises free entertainment and instant news, with the aid of friendly sponsors.

If one of the businesses contemplating friendly sponsorship happened to be one of the great pioneers of electricity itself, what better way to present itself than through a radio series featuring great moments in scientific discovery? Eureka. So in 1943, Westinghouse Laboratories, home to the invention of the first transformer, launched *Adventures in Research*.

Affairs of Dr. Gentry

Ann Gentry: I've left my pocketbook in the living room come.

Rod, her son: With wings of love, Mom, with wings of love.

Ann: And greed.

Rod: Yeah a little greed too.

Every soap opera needed a hook and Dr. Gentry's was that she was a woman trying to survive and thrive in a man's world. In 1957, when the only show that is still extant aired, lady doctors were undoubtedly a rarity, so the show chose its profession well though the hook had certainly been used many times before with slightly different lures.

Madeline Carol starred in this fifteen minute slice of the two hour soap opera set broadcast over NBC's afternoon airwaves in the waning days of old time radio. It seems to have been a relaxed show with a touch of humor, rather than following the maudlin theatrical style of the more traditional soaps. The show must have done passably well as it survived until 1959.

One side note about this January 24th show is that it contains a promo for *Monitor*, that great weekend long program that kept NBC on the radio through the sixties and into the seventies. The big announcement was that *Monitor* was now going to start on Friday night instead of Saturday and every fourth week would feature sports news from *Sports Illustrated*. Ironically it is likely that the only reason this episode of *Affairs of Dr. Gentry* exists is as an air check for the *Monitor* announcement.

Affairs of Peter Salem

Salesman: You see Sir, a lady hanged herself in that wardrobe.

Peter Salem: Joan do we need a wardrobe?

Joan Salem: No..., especially not that one.

According to otr.com, Louis Vittes of Thin Man and Mr. and Mrs. North fame created *Affairs of Peter Salem*, while Santos Ortega played the part of Salem. Ortega was a radio legend portraying detectives ranging from Charlie Chan to Nero Wolfe. The program aired over Mutual from May, 1949 until April, 1953.

Only five minutes of this program exist and it's the discovery of these few minutes that makes for an interesting tale. Apparently Brooks Blevens of Lyons College was working with a reel-to-reel recording of the college's Holy Week broadcasts from the 1950s when he stumbled across the a snippet of Peter Salem on the backside of the tape. The tape had been donated to the college by a retired professor who had hung onto them because his father had delivered the Holy Week Devotionals that were on the tape. Dr. Blevens collaborated with Jack French of the Metro Washington Old time Radio Club to make this clip of a show thought lost forever available to the public. You can find it at otr.com/affairs.shtml .

African Drums

Professor Edwards: These people only become cannibals at the full moon. They never kill 'til the full moon appears. It's a sort of ritual with them.

Jack: But that's tomorrow.

Edwards: Yes, we have to get out of here tonight or we'll never get out.

With these words and a chilling scream from the Professor's daughter, another episode of the spine-chilling *African Dreams* ends with a trademark of the serial, the cliff-hanger. It was classic Hollywood adventure that kept the young and the not quite as young as all that coming back to the Saturday Matinee week after week. This however was not a serial that flickered across the big screen at your local Bijou, but a story that emanated from the darkest recesses of your radio. The rhythmic drumbeats that thundered from the speaker promised adventure with Professor Anton Edwards and a motley crew that included his daughter, his assistant and his native guide. *African Drums*, also known as *Moon Over Africa*, had another cast member that will stand out in the memory of even the most jaded serial enthusiast. By the first episode, Professor Edwards had already acquired the services of a talking skull which he believed spoke the language of the lost Atlantians. Toss in cannibals, sacred pythons and a volcano and you have a fast moving 1935 serial from Talbot Mundy, best known for his Jack Armstrong work. If you enjoy early old time radio serials give the program a try. You can find the first ten shows in the serial at archive.org/details/MoonOverAfrica .

Against the Storm

Professor Allen: It maybe that man's fellow feeling has been slower to develop than his mechanical and scientific skill but we're learning.

One of the most intelligent and best written of radio's daytime dramas, *Against the Storm* may have been too classy for the weekday afternoon audience. It was the only daytime serial to win a Peabody Award, yet its initial run was only three seasons and two revivals lasted only one season each.

Writer Sandra Michael was the program's driving force and it was both her well drawn characterization of the pacifist Professor Jason Allen and carefully crafted scripts that make the half dozen available programs worth listening to. Roger DeKoven's understated yet sincere performance as the Professor, a cut above most of the leading players in the soaps, also adds to the listening experience.

My favorite is the May 30th, 1941 show as the Professor reminisces about war and peace on a Memorial Day from his childhood. It is a simple conversation between two children lounging beside a brook. It is just a conversation full of children's naive hope for a peaceful world, yet as the world stood on the brink in 1941, a very timely conversation. As is often the case archive.org is the best place to find this show,

archive.org/details/Against_The_Storm .

Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot

Poirot: This is the Cozy Room Apartment Renting Agency?

Clerk: When we got something to rent, yeah.

Poirot: I have the desire to rent an apartment.

Clerk: Who hasn't?

So from the pen of England's Agatha Christie came the boastful Belgian to the American shores only to be stymied by a desk clerk. The Mutual Network was more accommodating, making room for the detective on Thursday evenings for eight months in 1945. Interestingly, the diminutive detective had appeared on the network as part of *Murder Clinic* several years before in *The Tragedy of Marsden Manor*.

Hercule made his debut in Agatha Christie's first novel in 1920 and despite his own author's dislike of the character, she called him "a little creep", his novels continued flowing from her pen until scant years before her death. That's not strictly true, Christie actually wrote a novel killing the detective off during World War Two, but she refrained from publishing it until 1975. Maybe knowing that he lay dead in a bank vault made writing his further adventures more palatable. Why did she dislike him? Well he was arrogant, lovingly referring to his "little grey cells" frequently as he boasted of his prowess, had no compunction about lying and dressed in that extreme dapper continental manner that the English profess to dislike with some fervor. However she did create the diminutive Belgian and he did make her rich. The love-hate relationship lasted across thirty novels and fifty short stories.

Poirot will likely survive for centuries hence along with his archetype Sherlock Holmes, as both are members of the old reliable detective set to which any filmmaker in need can turn. Similarities to Holmes aside, Hercule Poirot is a well realized character whose ability and personality makes him, for good or for ill, unforgettable and of course Agatha Christie's ability to mystify help his stories along a bit.

Unfortunately while Mutual's script writer managed to capture the detective's personality, Agatha Christie's skill with plot and setting proved elusive. Poirot seems out of place in what sounds like another just another American detective serial. Fans of the mystery serial looking for a different sort of protagonist will enjoy this one, but it never lives up to its full potential. archive.org/details/otr_herculepoirot-us has half a

dozen shows for download, while mysteryfile.com/M_Clinic.html has Hercule's appearance on the superior *Murder Clinic*.

Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen

Speed: Jimmy watch yourself, I'm afraid that strut's going.

Jimmy: Look at it shake, Speed, and look the wing!

Speed: It can't hold much longer.

The fighter pilots of the Great War twisting their flimsy canvas and wood biplanes into spectacular loops and dives to strafe the enemy.

The Heroic Eddie Rickenbacker.

The Villainous Red Baron.

The wonder of the first solo Trans Atlantic flight.

Charles Lindbergh and his Spirit of Saint Louis.

These were the great personalities and events of early aviation and they captured the imagination of Americans both physically young and young at heart.

So it was natural that the 1930s saw the rise of the Flying Ace as the most glamorous of adventurers. He was the hero every young man and many of the young ladies wanted to become, so books, comic strip, movies and radio shows featuring the intrepid airman sprang to life. In fact the first comic strip featuring an airman, Tailspin Tommy, debuted in 1928. Radio sent its first airmen into the ether in 1932 with Air Stories of the World War written by George Bruce.

Radio juveniles, quarter hour after school shows for children and teens, were big business in the world of radio syndication. So it was also natural that young air heroes would fly into the hearts of American youngsters in fifteen minute increments Monday through Friday. A trio of youngsters made up aviation syndication in the 1930s. They went by the names Jimmy Allen, Speed Gibson and for the girls the somewhat different Ann of the Airlines.

Jimmy Allen was a teenage flyer invented by two aces of the Great War Bob Burtt and Bill Moore. Salesman Russell Comer caught the spirit of the project and sold it to Skelly Oil. Written by Bob and Bill and produced by Russell on Skelly's money, a new serial The Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen was born.

The tale began at the Kansas City airport with sixteen year old Jimmy aspiring to become a flyer. His early attempts met with near disaster, but did net him a friend and instructor, ace airman Speed Robertson. They were joined by mechanic Flash Lewis and the trio soon began a series of adventures that lasted years. The show became popular enough to spawn the Jimmy Allen Flying Club and a 1936 Paramount film, *Sky Parade*.

The show had unexpected longevity. It was dropped by Skelly and eventually cancelled in the early forties. This seemed like the end of the runway for young Jimmy. However with another tailwind of aviation popularity brought it back to the airwaves. The scripts were re-recorded for another generation of young flyers and new scripts were added for a second run of over 400 shows.

Dozens of Jimmy Allen shows still exist and make for fun listening for those with a young ear. Since a couple of long runs of consecutive shows exist, the best way to listen to Jimmy is just to start with the first show and let the hours slip away in fifteen minute

increments. You can download the whole run of Jimmy or individual shows at archive.org/details/TheAirAdventuresOfJimmyAllen .

Air Force Hour

Climb aboard the Air Force Hour and prepare to take off in song.

This showcase for the Air Force Band began on January 18, 1948. It featured performances featuring the wide variety of Air Force groups from the full 90 piece Symphony Orchestra through a Jazz dance ensemble to the harmonies of the Singing Sergeants.

The *Air Force Hour* must have been a huge morale booster for a group that was almost MIA after the end of World War Two. With budget cuts, the group was down to five members when George S. Howard was given the task of reorganizing the band. Several more officers were added to the command team and a Bandsman Training School was opened. Soon the Air Force Band saw its numbers swell to 115 members and the new group made its debut on August 17, 1946 at the Watergate Auditorium.

Aided by the publicity from its new radio program and other endeavors, the Air Force Band began to tour extensively in the fifties. These trips took the band through Europe, the Far East and South America. You can read more about the Air Force Band at usafband.com/ .

The two programs of *Air Force Hour* that still exist today are pleasant excursions into the music of another time, with brief promotional pieces about Air Force endeavors in the middle of each show.

Air Stories of the World War

I never expected to get back out of that. Those two Fokkers almost had me, Sir. It was queer it seemed as if the ship almost began to fly itself. I heard the guns going and the Fokkers just fell out of sight. I don't know how I got back.

Birthed in 1932, *Air Stories of the World War* was the first radio show to feature airmen though it certainly wouldn't be the last. According to researcher Jack French more than twenty five airplane serials would wing their way across the old time radio airwaves. Also known as *George Bruce's Air Stories*, the program featured fictionalized accounts of pilots of the Great War drawn from the extensive writings of pulp fiction hack George Bruce. Bruce is credited with being an early aviator and knowing pilots from the World War, but he wasn't directly involved in the war.

George Bruce wandered through the field of pulp fiction for over a decade, but left light footprints. He is probably best known for stamping his name across a legion of air magazines as he apparently tried to make the genre his own. In 1931 and 32, *George Bruce's Air Novels* and *George Bruce's Sky Fighters* from publisher Fiction House only survived for a single issue each. *George Bruce's Aces* also only lasted for one issue, but this was just a re-branding of *Aces* which had been going since 1929. Things improved slightly with the launch of *George Bruce's Contact* and *George Bruce's Squadron* for Adventure House publishers in 1933 as they ran eleven issues each before merging into a

single publication called *Squadron* which lasted three more issues. Copies of these magazines are still around and can be found in the ten to twenty dollar price range in antique stores or on EBay.

George Bruce also authored a multitude of non-air stories in the late twenties and the thirties before moving on to Hollywood screenplays in the forties. Among other magazine, he wrote for *Over the Top*, *Thrilling Sports*, *Argosy* and *Action Novels* and created private eye Red Lacey for *Popular Detective*.

Four episodes of *Air Stories* have survived and are in quite good shape for programs from the early thirties. All of them make interesting listening for fans of airmen and war drama. A favorite is *Deacon from Hell* that tells the story of the son of a pacifist minister who struggles with his duty to country, the opinions of those around him and his loyalty to his family and father. You can hear *Deacon from Hell* and *A New Face* at freeotrshows.com/otr/g/George_Bruces_Air_Stories.html.

Jack French wrote a wonderful piece on this show and other flying programs from the golden age of radio titled *Keep 'Em Flying: Radio Aviators* at otrsite.com/articles/artjf005.html. More writings of Jack French, Terry Salomonson, Dr. Walter J. Beaupre and other old time radio authors can be found at otrsite.com/articles/.

Al Jolson

Mammy, Mammy, I'd walk a million miles
For one of your smiles, my Mammy

Before there was Bing, before there was Frankie, there was a man in black face down on one knee singing to his Mammy. Of course that's an oversimplification and a stereotype. Al Jolson was far more than a black face song and dance man and he was there during Bing and Frankie. In a sense he was there after Bing as he took back the Kraft Music Hall in 1947 after Crosby turned in his key to the auditorium.

So who was Al Jolson? The simplest explanation is that he was the first rock star; it was just rock's loss that the backbeat hadn't been invented yet. Imagine Babe Ruth becoming a stickball superstar decades before the advent of organized baseball and you have some idea of the irony. Al was a white man singing black music in a powerful and suggestive way while using his unparalleled personal magnetism to leave crowds screaming for more. Does that sound familiar? Elvis was the next man to possess this alchemy of performance and personality and with all due respect to Mr. Presley, Al made Elvis look one dimensional. While the King of Rock 'n Roll never truly succeeded beyond the field of music, The World's Greatest Entertainer conquered the trifecta of music, stage and screen with a healthy radio career thrown in.

Speaking of his radio career and you knew we would, it began when the Great One joined Paul Whiteman on a musical variety show for NBC and Kraft in 1933, before it came to be called the *Kraft Music Hall*. In a pattern that would be repeated through most of Jolson's radio career, he didn't seem to have time for this new show and appeared somewhat sporadically. He finally left for good after about a year and a half. Unfortunately no shows from these early Kraft days are known to exist today.

Next in 1935-36, Al worked a year on the hour long NBC *Shell Château*, another musical variety show. Predictably he left the program when he grew tired of either the show or its demands on his time. One interesting note is that the producer was a name who would figure prominently in network entertainment for decades, Carroll Carroll. Copies of two dozen episodes of Al Jolson on *Shell Château* exist. They are somewhat rough listening however as the audio is often sub par and the show is unremarkable save for the novelty of hearing Jolson in his early radio days. His voice is remarkably vibrant and transmits well given the quality of radio at that time. He seems to sing a bit higher and more powerfully than in later shows. You can find them at archive.org/details/OTRR_Shell_Chateau_Singles.

Later in 1936, Jolson was lured to CBS for the half hour *Lifebouy Program*. He seemed to like this half hour mix of music and comedy better than the hour long variety shows as he stuck with CBS for almost two and a half years. The show's humor played off Harry Einstein's character Parkyarkus, the old Eddie Cantor sidekick. Music was supplied by Martha Raye as well as Jolson. Only two shows exist from this Jolson run and both sound badly dated. The humor is stale and Martha Raye's singing servers only to ask the question of why someone other than Jolson is singing on the Al Jolson show.

Over three years would pass before Jolson would return to CBS for the 1942-43 season of *The Colgate Program*. These half hour shows apparently featured weekly guest stars as Bob Benchley and Monty Wooley appear on the two shows that still exist of this brief Jolson radio run. As with the previous Jolson show a female vocalist appears on each show, Carole Bruce in this case, limiting Al to the introductory number and a one song late in the program. The guest stars add a little zip to the proceedings, elevating the show above the *Lifebouy Program*.

Kraft came calling again late in Jolie's career. Al began guest starring regularly on Bing Crosby's *Kraft Music Hall* and his star once again soared with the release of Columbia's *The Jolson Story*. When Bing left the old music hall in 1947, Al Jolson was a natural choice to headline the program he had abandoned almost a decade and a half before. This time he lasted until May 26, 1949 when he gave his final radio bow opposite sidekick Oscar Levant and his guest, legendary funnyman Groucho Marx who appeared regularly on the show.

The *Kraft Music Hall* is the easiest on the ear of all the Jolson shows. Levant, exiled from his Information Please career, makes a fine sidekick for Al. A laconic wit and concert quality keyboardist, Oscar could match Jolson in both musical and comedy performance, elevating him far above the sidemen who had been perpetrated on Al in previous shows. The show offered plenty of Jolson's tunes, a Levant piano solo, comedy and top guest stars. Groucho Marx, Jimmy Durante, the Day, Doris and Dennis, and Bing Crosby all made multiple appearances on the Hall and movie stars drop by as well with Bogart, Lamour, Grant and Roy Rogers saying hello.

Mike's Jolson page, mikescaife.btinternet.co.uk/index.htm, has a weekly Al Jolson radio program that is often from the music hall along with last week's show, Jolson recordings and a weekly Bing Crosby music hall show.

A (relatively) Brief Biography

Asa was born in Lithuania to cantor Moshe and Naomi Yoelson in the mid 1880s when exactly no one knows. Birth records weren't too important in that time and place,

especially if the baby happened to be Jewish. Seeking a life beyond trouble Tsarist Russia, Moshe Yoelson made the long trek to the America a few years after Asa was born. The senior Yoelson settled in Washington D.C. where he led services for the Talmud Torah Synagogue starting in about 1892. The rest of the family came to join the Rabbi soon after, however the new world was not kind to the Yoelsons, as mother Naomi passed away a year after she arrived in America. Asa was about nine at the time and his mother's death had a shattering effect on the young man. His relationship with his father grew strained as he entered his teenage years; however he grew close to his brother Hirsh.

The two Yoelson boys became interested in popular American music, especially ragtime. Hirsh ran away from home to New York just before the turn of the century and Al soon followed looking for his big brother. After Al found Hirsh in New York, the brothers made money any way they could, but preferred performing. Broke and hungry they returned home to a new stepmother, Hessi, who had come over from the old country to marry their father. Home couldn't hold Al however. Soon he joined the circus and later was taken to Saint Mary's Industrial Home for Boys after being pulled from his job singing in a Baltimore bar. After another unsuccessful try at home life, Al played sidekick on both the Burlesque and Vaudeville circuits. A failure after the tragedy of his voice breaking, Al headed home once more.

Fortunately his brother had found some success singing the Burlesque circuit and encouraged by this success, the two formed their own song and comedy act. They changed their names to the more American sounding Harry and Al and eventually adopted the last name Jolson. They knocked around New York and the East Coast before meeting up with disabled comedian Joe Palmer in 1904.

Palmer wanted to do comedy in vaudeville as a three man team, but young Al was having problems as a comedian. James Francis Dooley, an old blackface comic, suggested that the young Al try blacking up. The result was amazing! Hiding the real Jolson behind this mask of burnt cork Jolie created a bold stage persona. The act soared as high as the lucrative Orpheum Circuit before Harry left late in 1905 after a fight with Al. Joe and Al carried on through the winter, but Palmer decided to retire the next summer and Al was on his own.

Jolson headed west to San Francisco and became a star on the western Vaudeville circuit. He found more than fame in Frisco as the tune says he left his heart there, marrying for the first time in 1907. Her name was Henrietta Keller and she was a pretty eighteen year old dancer. He continued his successful vaudeville career for a few more months before taking a pay cut to join Lew Dockstader's Minstrel show. He toured with the minstrel act for a couple years before making his mark as a solo act in the vaudeville palaces of the east coast.

In 1911 Jolson took another pay cut, this time to appear in the star studded opening of the Shubert Brothers' Winter Garden Theater. The variety show called *La Belle Paree* featured many of the biggest acts of the day and ran for hours. At first Al was just another act, but this didn't last long. He soon became known as the most exiting act on the bill. Though the play lasted only three months on Broadway, Al Jolson was a Broadway Star by the time the final curtain descended. In fact he was such a star that Al convinced the Shuberts to let him take *La Belle Paree* on the road for an autumn tour of the New England States. It was first touring Broadway show.

Jolson returned to Winter Garden for the musical *Vera Violetta*. Next came 1912's *The Whirl of Society*, which featured Al's blackface character Gus for the first time and the 1913 *The Honeymoon Express* in which Jolson got down on one knee to sing for the first time. He also created his most infamous Broadway trademark during *Honeymoon Express* as he turned to the audience after one of his songs and ask if they would rather see the rest of the play or see him. With the crowd roaring its approval, Al put on a concert for the crowd as the other performers watched in astonishment. This marked the start of Al Jolson as Star with a capital S. He had top billing in the next year's *Dancing Around* and had his name above the title for the 1916 *Robinson Crusoe Jr.* which toured for over a year after its Broadway run.

America's Greatest Entertainer, Al Jolson, read the playbill when *Sinbad* opened in 1918. The new musical was an unqualified success, but there was difficulty at home, the oft ignored Henrietta finally filed for divorce. Al's hectic work schedule and a lifestyle of womanizing and gambling had cost him something he held dear. Possibly because he didn't want to come home, Al kept *Sinbad* on the road for almost two years. The shoe became more a Jolson concert than a play as some of his greatest songs began to emerge, *Avalon*, *Swanee* and *My Mammy* all became part of this show.

After this astounding rise to stardom, what more could an entertainer want? How about opening a show in a Theater named for you? *Bombo* and Jolson's 59th Street Theater both opened in 1921. This vehicle featuring *Toot, Toot, Tootsie* and *April Showers* toured for three years after a six month run on Broadway. According to legend when the show played in Chicago 'accepted' the invitation of some very tough gentlemen to come and meet their boss. Capone is reputed to have told Jolson that he liked him because his name was Al too and asked to hear *April Showers*.

One event that is more certain was Al's second marriage. On the show's summer break in 1922, Jolson tied the knot with Ethel Delmar, a chorus girl from George White's *Scandels*. It would be nice to report that this marriage was a success, but unfortunately it turned out to be an even bigger disaster than the first. Ignored by her husband, Ethel turned to drink, a problem that grew worse after her 1926 divorce from Al. She spent the last 40 years of her life in nursing homes where to Jolson's credit all her bills were covered by his estate.

Back to the stage, *Big Boy* opened January of 1925. A musical about Al's blackface creation Gus as a jockey, it featured a live horse on stage. Even though the show was a huge success, Al began developing throat problems and it had to be closed for several weeks while he recovered. A trip to Bermuda and cruising off the California coast helped somewhat and the play continued for several more months on Broadway before moving to Chicago. In the Windy City *Big Boy* played opposite rival Eddie Cantor's *Kid Boots*. Jolson's throat problem's returned as Cantor came down with an attack of pleurisy. Neither performer wanted to close his show and leave the other as the sole attraction in Chicago so they toughed out their physical problems until Eddie literally collapsed on stage. Al saw Eddie off on the train then did one more show and closed up shop.

He had gone from a hungry urchin playing second banana to his brother as they played smalltime vaudeville at the turn of the century to the greatest showman in the America. For most performers this would have been a miraculous career. For Jolson it was just the warm-up act to immortality.

Al Jolson had toyed with motion pictures, notably in collaboration with D.W. Griffith in 1923. *Mammy's Boy* with the famed Jolson in the lead might have been an interesting idea in Griffith's head, but you have to wonder how the most famed singer of his era would have translated on a silent screen. Jolson seemed to have wondered this as well. He watched the early rushes, hated how he looked on the primitive film and took a boat to England rather than finish it.

The idea of sound on film sparked his interest and he appeared in front of the cameras for the Vitaphone short, *A Plantation Act*. This might or might not have been the end of his dabbling with movies, if George Jessel hadn't been greedy and Eddie Cantor had possessed more foresight. Jessel was slated to star in the film version of his Broadway hit *The Jazz Singer*, however he wanted more than Warner Brothers would give. The studio felt for the money Jessel wanted they could get a bigger star, so they approached Cantor. When he turned them down flat, they turned to the biggest Broadway star of them all, Jolson. Warner's needed a hit and offered Al significant cash to come to Hollywood. He accepted and filming of *The Jazz Singer* became in the summer of 1927.

Only the songs were supposed to have sound in the film, but Jolson couldn't resist some theatrical adlibbing. His dialogue was left in and *The Jazz Singer* became the first part talkie. Its October 6th, 1927 opening was a smash hit and the film went on to make millions. Warner Brothers had their needed hit and Jolson became a movie star.

The Singing Fool was Jolson's follow up to *Jazz Singer* and was just as successful. It featured the debut of a song that Jolson's songsmiths had written as something of a joke. He told them that he needed a great song to put over his next film, so they created the most emotion laden tearjerker that they could come up with, *Sonny Boy*. It did the trick becoming the first American album to sell a million.

Unfortunately his next films were virtual reprints of his two successes and the public quickly grew bored with them. There was 1929's *Say It with Songs* and *Mammy* and *Big Boy* in 1930, but none of them lived up to the success of his first films.

The year 1928 was a good year in Jolson's personal life as he fell in love with yet another chorus girl. Her name was Ruby Keeler. Normally this was the cue for Al to turn on his charm and marry the girl, but this time there were complications. Ruby didn't seem overly interested and her boyfriend, Johnny Costello, was a mobster. Al as usual got what he wanted, showering Ruby with gifts and flowers and finally according to legend a million dollars as pre-wedding gift. A million in cash can turn any girl's head and the two were married late in the year. Keeler would call the marriage rocky, but it went quite well by Al's standards as it lasted over a decade.

Professionally Jolson began to struggle, after three poor movies he returned to Broadway with *the Wonder Bar* and flopped. He tried *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* for United Artists in 1933 and the audience agreed with the title staying away in droves. Meanwhile his wife was becoming a star. Ruby Keeler was in the right place at the right time as *42nd Street* created a new style of musicals. Her tap dancing stole the show and she quickly became a major star appearing in eight films in four years.

As his wife's star ascended, Jolson's continued to set. He tried a film version of *Wonder Bar* and it flopped as badly as the play had. Warner Brothers tried to help his career by putting husband and wife together in 1935's *Go to your Dance*. Unfortunately while it was a modest hit, it did nothing for Jolson's career and ended Keeler's.

With both their careers foundering, the couple's bickering grew worse. Ruby finally had enough in 1939 and walked out. This led to Al's unusual attempt at reconciliation. Trying to restart both his career and marriage he hit the road with the musical *Hold onto Your Hats* with Ruby as one of the stars. The rehearsals and pre-Broadway tour convinced Ruby Keeler that she had seen enough and she left the show and Jolson for good.

Hold onto Your Hats actually did very well for Jolson on Broadway letting him taste success again for the first time in years. Sadly his health deteriorated and he had to close the show in February of 1941. He tried to reopen the show after his health improved, but the moment had passed. Soon he had a new cause to throw his efforts into, World War 2.

Al Jolson was a patriot and entertaining the troops became his passion. He traveled all over the world giving as many as four performances a day to raise the spirits of war weary American Boys. Al's health betrayed him again and he wound up back in America. Actually this was a blessing in disguise for Jolson. After recovering from pneumonia, he began to tour the army hospitals and camps. On this tour he met a lady X-Ray technician who went by the unlikely name of Erle Galbraith. She nursed him back to health from recurring malaria that he had picked up overseas and they were married in 1945. Their five year marriage lasted until Jolson's death and was the most satisfying of all his marriages.

Jolson didn't quite get around to retiring in the last five years of his life however. George M. Cohan, the great Broadway producer, composer and star, came to his rescue without ever saying hello. *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, the Cohan bio pic starring Jimmy Cagney, had been box office magic and an idea was born. What about a bio of the great Jolie? So *The Jolson Story* came to be. Starring the acting of Larry Parks and the voice of Al Jolson, the picture was such a hit in 1946 that the same arrangement was used three years later in 1949 for *Jolson Sings Again*. It was also during this time that Jolson starred in his most successful radio show replacing Bing Crosby as host of the *Kraft Music Hall* from 1947-49. In September 1950, Al Jolson made one final appearance for his country giving a concert tour for the soldiers in Korea. The tour took his remaining health and he passed away October 23rd, 1950.

He passed away when he was back on top of the world with a caring wife and the applause of his country and its soldiers in his ears. It was a fitting way for the first great star of the 20th Century to exit the stage.

Blackface

Can you imagine a New York newspaper headline "World's Greatest Entertainer Blacks Up in Broadway Sensation!"? A hundred years ago few would have flinched. The last minstrel act appeared on Broadway just before 1910 and blackface was used on the Great White Way by Al Jolson, George Cohan and others well into the 1930s. It lasted through the forties in the films of the Hollywood studio system. In fact the story of blackface in America is virtually the story of American theater.

William and Lewis Hallam are credited with bringing fully professional theater to America in 1752 when they and their 15 person troupe arrived from England. After his father died, Lewis Hallam, Jr. became the theater's leading man and was the first

practitioner of the blackface in the New World. While this occurred in the late 1700s, it wasn't until the 1830s with the invention of the minstrel show that blackface became prominent.

Minstrelsy is considered the first theatrical form to originate in America. Thomas D. Rice rose to prominence with a "Jim Crow" character that helped establish the genre in the late twenties or early thirties. His plays were considered the best of the sudden plethora of minstrel material. It didn't take long for former slaves to discover that in blackface they were acceptable entertainers in venues that would not accept them otherwise. By the 1840s both black and white minstrel troupes toured the country. Stephan Foster's emergence in the fifties as one of the first professional songwriters helped the minstrel show by providing higher quality songs. *Camptown Races*, *Suwanee River*, *My Old Kentucky Home* and *Jeannie with the Light Brown* were the finest songs of their era and have become woven into the very fiber of American music.

As vaudeville rose in the 1880s it brought blackface along from the minstrel shows that served as one of its prime influences. This in turn created high profile blackface stars such as Al Jolson and George Cohan who continued Broadway's tradition of 'corking up' when their earning power brought them onto America's biggest stage.

From our vantage point in the 21st century it is hard to believe that crudely belittling an entire race was ever considered good clean fun. From the vantage point of an early 1900s performer, blackface was simply part of American theater. It was part of assuming a role just like all the other roles they assumed. If we condemn Al Jolson, George M. Cohan and Eddie Cantor for using the device we might also examine our feelings for folks like the black Broadway star Bert Williams, comedians Laurel and Hardy, the Three Stooges and Bob Hope not to mention Bing Crosby and even Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. All of them used blackface at least once during their careers. To be fair Bert Williams, the top black entertainer of the early 1900s, had to use blackface if he wanted to perform, Bob Hope dropped blackface from his routine early in his career and Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland merely did what the powerful studio system insisted they do. I doubt any of them had racist motives; however it is interesting that Shirley Temple turned down a part in *Babes on Broadway* because of the film's blackface routine. Maybe the young star had a better view of the changing racescape than did adults around her. Of course an enduring friendship with Bill Robinson, Bojangles, may have helped make the decision easier.

How does this relate to the decidedly non-visual medium of radio? Mostly it is cultural since blackface's fall from grace tends to mirror the country's gradually dawning view of racism as evil. Radio's formative years in the thirties coincide with the last years of blackface's common acceptance and its glory days in the forties and fifties match the decline of blackface from public favor. Early radio had its share of minstrelsy. Fibber McGee featured Silly Watson, a Stepin Fetchit type sidekick, in the thirties, while Jack Benny featured his cast in minstrel shows in his programs in 1934, 36 and 42. Of course the first great radio show, *Amos 'n Andy*, featured the white men speaking as black men in a sort of blackthroat.

As radio progressed its representations of African Americans became somewhat kinder, but unfortunately didn't allow for any black stars, save one. Eddie Anderson joined the Jack Benny cast as Rochester in 1937 and it is interesting to note his progress. At first he was a bit player, not credited as part of the cast, but gradually his role grew

into a solid cast member who by the mid forties was considered as important to the ensemble sitcom as featured players Phil Harris and Dennis Day. When Jack Benny's show jumped to television, Anderson was billed as a co-star and was second in importance only to Benny himself. While Anderson was the co-star, he was still also the valet. It would be many years before the networks would throw off the mantle of blackface and race and allow black men to shine as television stars, but Anderson with the aid of Benny laid the groundwork.

Tidbits

The best places on the internet to find out more about the life of this American Icon are musicals101.com/jolson.htm, myweb.tiscali.co.uk/sherwoodtimes/blackf.html and jolson.org/ all of which I used in writing about Jolson.

A health selection of Al Jolson's 78 RPM recordings can be found at archive.org/details/AlJolson.

A Plantation Act, Jolson's 1926 Vitaphone film short was thought to be lost for years, but thanks to luck and some hard work it exists again. A mislabeled copy of the film was found in the National Archive of the Library of Congress, however it was only the silent film copy without the accompanying sound disk. When a group known as the Vitaphone project was formed, they made finding the disk recording of the audio for *A Plantation Act* their top priority. The group tracked rumors of a disk to the Baltimore area and managed to acquire it for a king's ransom from the family of the deceased collector who had owned the disk.

Unfortunately the disk had broken years earlier and been glued back together with the groove misaligned so that it wouldn't play. With painstaking care the album was unglued and reassembled, run through extensive computer aided restoration and added back to the unearthed film from the National Archive. *A Plantation Act* lives again and at last check was playing for a new audience on Youtube.

Al Pearce from Hollywood

Elmer Blurt: "There's nobody home today, I hope, I hope, I hope."

West Coast comedian Al Pearce and his brother Carl started the *Happy Go Lucky Hour* over San Francisco's KFRC in 1929. The variety show, which was a sort of vaudeville of the air, became a hit over the emerging Don Lee west coast network that KFRC co-anchored. This soon led to a national show CBS since the Don Lee network was the California branch of CBS. The program jumped to NBC in 1933 where it became *Al Pearce and his Gang*.

Al's network show was a mixture of music and sketch comedy featuring his zany gang culled from the staff of KFRC. The most prominent member of the gang was Al's creation, Elmer Blurt. A shy door-to-door salesman, Elmer was forever hoping that customers weren't at home and when they were he was apologetic about bothering them. While this made him a suspect sales force, he made Al Pearce's career. 'I hope, I hope, I hope' became something of a national catchphrase and in 1943 *Here Comes Elmer* flickered across the screen with Al playing the shy one opposite Dale Evans.

The program became network radio's version of a utility infielder. Al and gang were never major stars so long term commitments proved elusive, but they were good enough to make the network schedule again and again. The show stayed on network air almost continuously until 1947, but saw a dozen shifts in broadcast time, sponsor or network according to John Dunning's *On the Air*.

A baker's dozen of *Al Pearce from Hollywood* shows can still be found. They are all from the 1939-40 season that Al and the Gang did for Dole Pineapple and feature musical offerings, Arlene Harris, Artie Auerbach as Mr. Kitzel and of course Elmer Blurt. While not top flight comedy, they make for an amusing half hour. Arlene Harris' monologues haven't aged well, but Elmer Blurt still has life left in the old I hopes and listening Mr. Kitzel is entertaining. The best shows are probably the March 6 show because of guest Gene Autry and the Christmas program, December 20, where Elmer meets a needy urchin. The Old Time Radio Researchers Group has a large collection of Al Pearce scripts in PDF format at otrr.org/FILES/Scripts_pdf/Al_Pearce_Show/. The Bay Area Radio Museum has a nice piece on Al and a streaming episode of one of Al's network shows at bayarearadio.org/schneider/pearce.shtml.

The Don Lee Network

Don Lee was the exclusive Cadillac distributor for California and as such a very wealthy man. He had a variety of interests and knew the value of advertising, so the young medium of radio naturally caught his attention. He purchased San Francisco's KFRC in 1926 and then added KHJ, Los Angeles a year later. His new stations were loaded with talent that could produce a variety of quality shows and the era of network radio was dawning, so Lee decided to hook his stations together with a network line. The McClatchy Newspaper organization liked what they heard on Don's network and their stations in Fresno, Stockton and Sacramento were added to the network in December of 1928. This arrangement made the Don Lee Network a California powerhouse that covered enormous portions of the state. It also made a young Bill Paley salivate. His fledgling CBS desperately needed west coast affiliates to become a true coast to coast network and compete with NBC. Here already assembled in California was a regional network that could make his dream come true in an instant.

Turning dream to reality was a little more difficult for Paley. He came to the coast to personally sell Don Lee on the idea and bumped heads with a man whose casual business style was diametrically opposed to Paley's east coast hustler approach. After spending a frustratingly nonproductive week aboard Lee's yacht, Bill Paley finally got what he wanted and the Don Lee-Columbia West Coast Network became part of CBS. The network feed was soon servicing 12 stations as Lee bought two more stations, added another owned by McClatchy and four Pacific Northwest stations joined.

After the CBS programming lineup ended at 8pm Western time, KFRC and KHJ fed the network using budding talent such as conductor Meredith Wilson, funnyman Al Pierce, the future Gildersleeve Harold Peary and Bea Benederet. The most popular of the network's programs may have been *Blue Monday Jamboree* which was a two hour comedy and musical variety show that featured most everyone on KFRC's staff. It was partly scripted and partly adlibbed and half the fun came from never knowing what might be coming up next. The Don Lee Network grew to 31 stations blanketing the entire west coast with its mix of nationally and locally produced programs.

The affiliation with CBS lasted until 1936. The two networks had been fighting for years about control of the west coast network as each wanted more of its own shows on in prime time. CBS ended the battle by purchasing KNX in Los Angeles. This destroyed the Don Lee network as the Pacific Northwest stations stuck with CBS and the McClatchy stations joined with Hearst's stations to form their own California network.

You can't keep a good network down, especially if a bit of luck comes its way. At the time the old Don Lee network was breaking up with CBS, Mutual was the new fledgling radio network on the national block. Tommy Lee, who had become the head of the network after his father's death, inked a deal with the new network and the Mutual-Don Lee Network sprang to life. The new west coast network had 12 stations, ten in California and two joining in via microwave from Hawaii. This new network lasted until the death of old time radio in the early fifties.

An excellent essay on the history of KFRC and the Don Lee network by John F. Schneider can be found at

oldradio.com/archives/stations/sf/kfrc1.htm, While Elizabeth McLoad wrote an interesting piece on regional networks located at midcoast.com/~lizmcl/regional.html.

Al Trace

Al Trace and his band Shuffle Rhythm appeared on his own show and as the orchestra for other shows throughout the thirties and forties. His most notable radio work was as the bandleader in *It Pays to be Ignorant*. At least one of his band's radio remotes from New York City has survived. It starts with his megahit *Mairzy Doats* and swings through a number of novelty tunes.

Aldrich Family

Woman yelling sharply: Henry, Henry Aldrich!
Cracking Teen Voice: Coming Mother!

According to Time magazine, in the late thirties the prolific Clifford Goldsmith was churning out poor plays and inflicting them on Broadway producers. One of them finally got tired of rejecting the eager playwright and told him to write about something he knew. Tired of writing slogans for insurance companies and lecturing high school students on the benefits of drinking milk, Goldsmith saw the wisdom of the suggestion. The resulting play was *What a Life* featuring adolescent Henry Aldrich. It became a Broadway success and was made into a movie. Radio came into the picture when Rudy Vallee asked for a series of radio skits featuring the Broadway family. This was followed by a season long appearance on the 1938-39 Kate Smith Show. General Miles liked the family enough to make *The Aldrich Family* the summer replacement for its Jell-O selling hit *The Jack Benny Show* in 1939. When Jack returned from his summer vacation, Henry Aldrich became the other Jell-O star moving to Tuesday Nights at eight. *The Aldrich Family* would be a network fixture until 1953.

By the early forties the show was one of the top sitcoms attracting 20 million listeners a week. Part of the program's appeal was in Henry's role as the lead player. He was the first teenage protagonist on the airwaves and the stories told from his viewpoint

had both a frantic and innocent air that could only come from a teenage mind. Many of the plots arose from Henry taking some trivial problem and building it into an earth shaking event. He was usually ‘aided’ by his dimwitted pal Homer which only made the problem more severe. While this was common sitcom material, when a teenager subject to the whims of authoritative parents and conniving peers was the lead, these problems grew to proportions adults could barely fathom.

Goldsmith came by Henry’s antics honestly drawing from his own teenage years and those of his sons. When one of the boys spotted something from his own life, an itemized bill would show up on Goldsmith’s nightstand. Since the playwright was earning three thousand dollars a week from writing Henry for the radio by 1943, he tended to pay the bill.

Henry Aldrich was also a hit with Hollywood. After the 1939 film *What a Life*, Paramount created a B movie franchise out of the adolescent cranking out twelve films between 1941 and 1944. Jackie Cooper appeared in the first two films, with Jimmy Lydon taking over the Henry Aldrich role for the later films.

One of the oddities of the program was the number of actors who played the various roles. Only House Jamison as the Henry’s father stayed for virtually the entire series. Henry himself was played by five different actors, but this was largely Uncle Sam’s fault. Ezra Stone was the best known and easily the best of the Henrys, but he was also draft age when the US entered World War Two. For a while the Army allowed Sergeant Ezra Stone to play Henry Aldrich while he was in the service, but eventually he was whisked off to war in 1942. Understudy Norman Tokar, who sounded surprisingly like Stone, took over for about a year. After Tokar came the less aurally pleasing Dickie Jones and Raymond Ives, before Stone finally returned from the war in 45. Stone finally tired of the role and Bobby Ellis, TV’s current Henry, took over to finish the last year of the series. Henry had three mothers and half a dozen sisters over the show’s decade and a half run.

The Aldrich Family went to television in 1949 for a four year run. The TV version fared even worse than the radio show as far as actors were concerned going through Robert Casey, Richard Tyler, Henry Girard, Kenneth Nelson and Bobby Ellis as Henry along with three actors each for Homer and Alice.

The best of the teen sitcoms on radio, *The Aldrich Family* is well represented with collectors today as almost a hundred shows still exist. The show is a wonderful look back at a vastly different America where families were the cornerstone of society, boys took their best girl to get a malt at the drugstore and problems like drugs and gangs were as distant as men on the moon. The best are those shows featuring Ezra Stone as Henry and Jackie Kelk as his pal Homer. The two form a wonderful Tom Sawyer-Huck Finn duo that is forever scheming to survive ‘the arrows of outrageous fortune’. Arrows that include being Tom Sawyered into cleaning a basement for a buddy’s Aunt while their ‘friend’ shovels one driveway for the duo and charges their father for the work and people who won’t order Christmas cards in August.

Some favorites include:

One of Homer’s first appearances as Henry’s sidekick in the October 31st, 1940 Halloween show. Pals stranded in wells, fake identities and stolen ladders feature prominently in the plot.

An April 1st, 1943 program which finds the boys far out of town trying to sell bonds during a blizzard. Along the way they pick up a cow which they attempt to lead home through the mounting snow. The cow is not cooperative.

The May 5th, 1949 show that saw the hapless Homer accidentally engaged to his domineering girlfriend Agnes. Facing a fate worse than life, Homer attempts to turn to Henry's attorney father for help without letting the lawyer know who his client is.

Aldrich shows can be streamed from freeotrshows.com/otr/a/Aldrich_Family.html or downloaded at archive.org/details/aldrichfamilyOTRKIBM.

Alan Young Show

Woman trying to seduce Alan: You're a man and I'm a woman.

Alan: Yeah?

Woman: Your father was a man and your mother was a woman.

Alan: Habit forming isn't it?

Long before he gained fame for chatting with a horse, Mr. Ed Star Alan Young made his radio debut as the summer replacement for Eddie Cantor over NBC in 1944. The summer turn was successful enough to earn Alan a sitcom slot on ABC that lasted until the summer of 1946. The show moved back to NBC for one season and then returned for brief run in 1949. The television version of the *Alan Young Show* based loosely on the radio program debut in 1950 and lasted for three seasons.

The radio show is a prototypical nice young man sitcom. Similar in many ways to the *Mel Blanc Show*, it allows Alan to get in plenty of one liners as he struggles with his problem of the week. Along the way he tries to impress girlfriend Betty and his nemesis the vain and oh so wealthy Herbert Updike the Third, voiced by Jim Backus of Magoo fame.

Probably because it came late in the annals of old time radio when more shows were being recorded over 50 episodes of the *Alan Young Show* are available. While not as funny as the top sitcoms, it can make for an entertaining half hour of listening. Once again archive.org is your friend, archive.org/details/alanyoungshowOTRKIBM.

Alex Dreier's Weekly News Analysis

Not many newscasts from the golden age of radio have survived and those that do are usually reports on World War Two. The two surviving Alex Dreier newscasts are no exception. Dating from 1945, both give updates on the war's effects around the world concentrating on the Japanese as the United States pushed ever closer to vanquishing their hated foe and ending the war.

Alex Dreier was an NBC radio newsman during the forties. He would go on to be a top television newscaster in Chicago and Los Angeles before turning his attention to acting and producing for television.

Alexander Wolcott, Town Cryer

My soul is not prophetic, it's hard enough, heaven knows, to see the shape of things past, but we can try, we can try.

Alexander Wolcott was a member of or at least a hanger on in New York literary circles. He sat at the famed Roundtable of the Algonquin Hotel with the likes of Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker. He never matched them for success however and the most famous Wolcott joke has Alexander asking "What is so rare as a Wolcott first edition?" The instant reply "A Wolcott second edition."

In the sole surviving Town Cryer program dating from 1933, Wolcott goes back in time to visit himself as a young man and the world as it was 1913. A piece of nostalgia that is itself taking a nostalgic look at the recent past through the eyes of vanity, the program hasn't worn well.

Alka Seltzer Time

Curt Massey singing: Please direct your feet to the sunny side of the street...
Curt: And that's where Martha and I are going to stay today, on the sunny side.
Martha: No doubt about it Curt that's the best medicine in the world.

Curt Massey and Martha Tilton were the singing stars of this fifteen minute daily feature that ran from 1949 to 53. Backed by Country Washburn's Orchestra the two would generally trade a few western or love songs as solos before finishing with a duet or two. Happy chatter from the hosts and singing commercials served as the transition between songs and in many ways it sounded like the DJ shows that would soon replace old time radio. One oddity is that in 1953 the program was heard at noon on Mutual and just before six in the evening on CBS.

Alka Seltzer Time is a pleasant sounding show that was well preserved in clean recordings. The music is a mix of classic western tunes, love songs and Americana featuring tunes like *Sunny Side of the Street* and *Spurs that Jingle Jangle*. Twenty of the transcribed shows from 1953 are available at archive.org/details/OTRR_Alka_Seltzer_Time_Singles.

All Star New Years Dancing Party

This predecessor to *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve* was hosted by Harry James for the Armed Forces Radio Network as 1945 drew to a close. It featured the music of Duke Ellington, Jimmy Dorsey, Count Basie and Les Brown along with lesser known bands. The hour long show jumped from city to city hitting hot spots in California, Chicago and New York.

The program sounds like it really is picking up live remotes across America and could have been a commercial free version of NBC's *New Year's Eve All-Star Parade of Bands*, but this may have been a trick of the AFRS technicians who were among the best in radio at editing thanks to years of experience in getting rid of commercials. At any rate the show can be found on any number of musical variety disks and should please jazz lovers.

All-Star Parade of Bands

Originating from Birdland, the New York Jazz club named after Charlie Parker, this program featured 'modern' bands including those of Count Basie and Stan Kenton. Sponsored by the Treasury Department to sell bonds, these remotes will appeal to big band and jazz fans.

Note that there was also a *New Year's Eve All-Star Parade of Bands* which was a two hour big band extravaganza held every December 31st. This NBC program started in 1929 and lasted until 1974.

All Star Western Theater

Nicer Villain: You mean frame the kid?

Not So Nice Villain: You're learning fast Ross.

NV: But Gorman that kid wouldn't have a chance, he's a stranger here.

NSNV: Sometimes I think you have possibilities of having a mind of your own.

Foy Willing and The Riders of the Purple Sage were the featured band and the supporting actors on *All Star Western Theater*. The program was a western variety show featuring music, corny comedy and cowboy drama all wrapped up in a thirty minute package. Many shows saw a guest drawn from the hits and misses of cowboy cinema including Eddie Arnold, Dale Evans, Smiley Burnette and Tex Ritter along with 'who is that' performers like Eddie Dean and Jimmy Wakely.

Each week in 1946 and 47, announcer Cottonseed Clark would proudly announce that the show's drama had been written especially for that week's star and the Riders would break into song to start another big show. After a quick Weber's Bread commercial and another song, the star was introduced and a fifteen minute playlet would kick off. This was followed by a couple more songs and the sound of the Riders cashing their paychecks. By late 47 and into 48 the formula changed a bit, either the show had run out of money for guest stars or they had used up the limited supply of B-grade cowboys because the Riders started going it alone. The sound of the show changed not at all as the western tunes and plays mixed with some western corn kept on coming.

The Rider of the Purple Sage barely looked back as their radio days faded to the sound of coconuts beating out their horses' rhythm. They had already had plenty of movie experience and in 1948 they began backing the King of the Cowboys, Roy Rogers. In 1952, Foy disbanded the group, but couldn't resist a call from Gene Autry to go on one last cowboy tour of the country in 1957. They also recorded with Gene that year and released their last group album 1958. That album, *Cowboy*, and another that they recorded with Mary Ford can still be found in a one CD compilation for about ten bucks.

All Star Western Theater is good old fashioned, silly cowboy fun. Nobody on the show took themselves seriously and the program has a light hearted feel that permeates everything from the music to the drama. Folks who enjoy old cowboy movies and western swing will find a lot to like about the program. All the programs have a similar feel so just pick the most intriguing title and listen away. Almost a hundred shows survive and as is often the case can be found on archive.org at archive.org/details/AllStarWesternTheaterOTRK1BM.

Allen Prescott Show

Prescott signing off: "Mrs. Housewife, I hope there's nothing burning."

Allen Prescott was the host of *Wife Saver* a five morning a week show from 1932 until 1942 which featured advice to woman on domestic problems like where to store hats and how to get the meat out of the can. In 1941 he changed the show to include recorded music in between his chats. In the mid forties, Allen focused his show on New York as he chatted about local celebrities and events. Allen made the jump to television with a none too successful small screen version of *The Wife Saver*. It lasted five shows. His next effort *Quizzing the News* did better lasting the 1948-49 season.

A couple recordings of *Wife Saver* still exist. They are a bit difficult on the ears and are really only interesting as a nostalgic look at the problems of American housewives. A few of Allen's 1946 New York shows are also extant. They are easier listening, but probably only avid fans of old time radio who are also New Yorkers will cherish them.

Amazing Mr. Malone

Malone is the name, John J. Malone, Attorney and Counselor at Law. Tonight I'd like to turn the spotlight on the old cliché 'Cleanliness is Next to Godliness'.

John J. Malone, as penned by the queen of the surreal mystery Georgiana Ann Randolph Craig, was a irreverent, bar dwelling attorney who survived more than solved the zany cases dropped on his head. Writing as Craig Rice, the author created a bizarre subset of mystery fiction that combined a hardboiled detective and screwball comedy. Maybe comedy noir is the best term for it.

Unfortunately by the time Malone made it to radio he was just another hard boiled detective. Gone were the eccentricities of plot and character. In their place was the gimmick of each case relating to a cliché like Early to Bed or Don't Judge a Book. It wasn't a good exchange. Craig Rice co-wrote the scripts with Gene Wang, but either the network sensors or her co-writer tore the heart from her writing style and her character.

First known as *Murder and Mr. Malone* and later *The Amazing Mr. Malone* the program debuted on ABC in 1947 with Frank Lovejoy playing the private eye. The show bounced across several timeslots and onto NBC before leaving the air in 1951. Eugene Raymond and George Petrie also played the detective at different points in the series. The detective made it to television briefly, 13 episodes in 1951, appeared in three films, fourteen novels and numerous short stories.

Fans of hard boiled detectives and bang-bang action might enjoy this series, but Sam Spade, Johnny Dollar and Dragnet did it far better.

boxcars711.libsyn.com/index.php?post_id=253250 has a podcast featuring *The Amazing Mr. Malone*. You can find out more about John J. Malone in all his forms at thrillingdetective.com/malone.html.

Amazing Mr. Smith

Every time something happens that owl hoots.
And every time that owl hoots something happens.

That bird hoots every hour.
This may turn out to be a gruesome watch crime.

The Mr. Smith is not only amazing but also elusive. According to John Dunning in his book *On the Air* and Michael Pitts' *Famous Movie Detectives*, Keenan Wynn played the part over Mutual in the summer of 1941, however the one program that still remains is listed as an audition show from 1946 starring Allyn Joslyn. Presumably the Mutual show is among the many lost old time radio programs, but was still remembered fondly in 1946 when someone tried unsuccessfully to revive him.

At any rate the *Hooting Owl* from November 5th, 1946 is a comedy mystery show set in Hollywood. It follows Jeffrey Smith, a magnet for trouble, and his valet and former sergeant when they were both in the army, Herbie. It's a cute little mystery with a light touch that makes you wish the Keenan Wynn version had survived.

Amazing Nero Wolfe (See Nero Wolfe)

America Calling

This 90 minute star studded extravaganza kicked off a nationwide effort to raise funds for the wives and children of Greek fighters. Jack Benny, Ronald Coleman, Clark Gable, Bob Hope, Tyrone Power, Barbra Stanwick, Shirley Temple and many others donated their services to appear on the show. The program aired across two of the national networks February 8th, 1941. It is interesting to listen to this program both for the star studded entertainment, as it seems half of Hollywood turned out to put on little skits, and for the zeal for freedom that was displayed a full ten months before Pearl Harbor and the US entry into World War Two.

America Dances

America Dances was a fairly standard live remote featuring Big Bands, but with one important difference. In addition to coast to coast American coverage by CBS, the program was also sent via shortwave to the BBC where it was broadcast across England. The two surviving shows feature Count Basie on one program and Harry James on the other.

American Adventure

Thomas Jefferson to his grandchildren: When you hear another express an opinion that is not yours, say to yourself he has a right to his opinion as I to mine. His arrow does me no harm and should I become a Don Quixote to bring all men by force of argument to one opinion?

The latecomer to old time radio, *American Adventure* was an educational program produced jointly by NBC and the University of North Carolina that aired in the 1955-56 season. The series showcased classic American values like courage, faith and loyalty to country using tales from American History. It featured stories of the great and small

throughout our country's history and while the acting would never win any awards, the stories are interesting enough to for anyone who enjoys American history. *American Adventure* might be especially useful for home schoolers and other educators, as it examines both feel good American stories and tough American issues like slavery and crooked politicians.

American Album of Familiar Music

Every Sunday evening at nine thirty millions of Americans gathered around their radios as the first bars of *Dream Serenade* filled the living room. Soon the "Golden Voice of Radio", Frank Munn, would launch into a pleasant rendition of a popular tune or a bit of light opera. Later the "Nightingale of the Airwaves", Jean Dickenson, would join the Voice as they sang their way through yet another *American Album of Popular Music*. For many the program was a nice way to relax after laughing their way through the antics of Jack Benny, Phil Harris, Bergan and McCarthy and Fred Allen. For others it meant that the children were finally tucked away in bed after a day of church services and dinner with the relatives. Whatever the reason they listened, they did listen and listened loyally for an astounding twenty years.

A few of the program's loyal followers might have been surprised to learn that the tenor voice they adored came from the throat of a roly-poly middle age man and that the show was produced by Frank and Anne Hummert, the famed husband and wife team behind the most popular soap operas of the afternoon. Those in the radio business weren't surprised at all. They knew Frank Munn from his days as tenor Paul Oliver for the *Palmolive Hour*, the show that vaulted him to fame in the twenties. They also knew and possibly feared the powerful Hummerts, who at their peak controlled over 24 hours of network radio in any given week.

While the Hummert assembly line of radio production is famous for its soap operas, the couple tried just about every style of programming from quiz shows to news to mysteries. One of the couple's favorite genres was music. According to Jim Cox in his book *Frank and Anne Hubbert's Radio Factory*, the couple tried 37 different music programs over the course of their busy career. While they had success with their many *Merry-Go-Round* programs and *Waltz Time*, *American Album of Familiar Music* was certainly their finest half hour in musical radio. From its NBC debut on October 11th, 1931 the program was well received and was a top 10 program for years. The Hummerts took a fairly hands off approach to the show letting Director James Haupt control the program though Frank was certainly in the shadows. The fact that famed and trusted tenor Frank Munn, who also sang on *Waltz Time*, was the show's star probably added to the producers' peace of mind.

The "Golden Voice of Radio" had earned his title in the mid-twenties as Palmolive helped pioneer what has been called the 'good music' format. *The Palmolive Hour* featured Broadway tunes, pop hits and light opera and Frank Munn who could sing all these styles quickly became the star of the program. After that show left the air, Munn quickly found work with the Hummerts. Their style of one practice a week just before airtime and a dislike of their stars making public appearances suited Munn down to the ground. He preferred a quiet life and knew that his rotund frame would never allow him to be a concert star, so life behind a microphone without a live audience was ideal. He

retired in 1945 and famed tenor Frank Parker took over the Sunday Evening microphone until the show ran its course in 1951.

Unfortunately only a couple of *American Album of Familiar Music* broadcasts are still in circulation and they are somewhat scratchy Armed Forces Radio transcriptions. Folks with a taste for American popular music and light opera will enjoy these vintage recordings. Those raised on Elvis and Chuck Berry will find them barely listenable.

American Challenge

Hey look at that sight. I never saw anything like it.
It's like flying to the end of the world.

A transcribed drama about American War Heroes, *American Challenge* was syndicated during the 1939-40 radio season. Two episodes still exist thanks to the efforts of the University of Memphis, Department of Communications radio archive. *Lafayette Escadrille* and *Bombers to Britain* feature stories of World War One Aces and star radio's hardest working actor, Elliot Lewis. Both make for interesting listening for military aviation buffs, but *Lafayette Escadrille* is probably the better of the two. It costars Joseph Kern and features an appearance by Captain Clive Balsey who was an actual member of the Escadrille.

American Forum of the Air

Announcer: The American Forum of the Air with Theodore Granik, its founder and moderator.

It is amazing that as we look to radio and television for entertainment at the dawn of a new millennium almost every type of program we enjoy was invented seventy to a hundred years ago. The first musical program was broadcast on Christmas Eve 1906, as inventor Reginald Fessenden sang a song and played his violin over the air on the first airing of the new medium of radio. It was also the first religious program as he read a few Bible verses. The next year fellow inventor DeForest Kelly became the first Disk Jockey. After the First World War, newly licensed KDKA gave the first professional newscast as the station broadcast the 1920 Harding-Cox Presidential returns.

Sam 'n Henry, a forerunner of the sitcom, debuted on January 12th, 1926. Two years later the name was changed to *Amos 'n Andy* and it became the first hit show of broadcasting. In 1929, Marion Jordan starred in the first soap opera over Chicago's WNER, *The Smith Family*. Her husband Jim played the part of her daughter's boyfriend. They would later define domestic comedy as *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

One of radio's most original ideas came from a young lawyer named Theodore Granik. He was putting himself through law school by working at Gimbel's Department Store and gradually became involved with the store's radio voice WGBS. As the assistant to the director, young Theodore did most everything from writing copy to doing sports reports and reading Bible verses. In 1928, he came up with an idea for his own program called *Law for the Layman*. After the station was sold in 1932 and Granik moved to WOR, he had a revelation. In one of the first radio debates, outspoken prohibitionist Mrs.

Ella Boole took New York Congressman Celler to task over the evils of alcohol and accused members of American Congress of the unthinkable act of imbibing spirits. Theodore Granik saw the potential of a weekly forum to allow listeners to hear both sides of social and political issues. WOR liked the idea and the first political debate program was launched. The show became a national feature of the budding Mutual Broadcasting Network in 1934.

According to *Time Magazine*, the show was quite a departure from the normally staid and heavily scripted network fair. The evening's debaters, often Congressmen from opposite sides of the aisle, would "work up from a calm discussion to an oral free-for-all with no holds barred... it takes a lot of doing to keep opponents from settling it outside." So powerful was *American Forum of the Air* that many political leaders listened to the program, debates sometimes continued from the radio show into the halls of congress and transcripts were published in the *Congressional Record*.

As with many news programs of the thirties and forties, *American Forum of the Air* has been poorly preserved. Only one recording is generally available. This is the December 28th, 1948 program featuring a rather drab discussion on the economics of the upcoming year.

American Gallery

A young Will Rogers after a missed rope trick: I only got jokes for one miss. Looks like I either got practice up and be a better roper or learn more jokes.

Not strictly an old time radio series, *American Gallery* is an Armed Forces Radio Transcription Service program that dates from the mid-1960s. Armed Forces Radio stayed active in the field of educational drama for about a decade after radio drama on the networks had died away. With series like *American Gallery*, *Horizon's West* and *When the West was Young*, the radio service did American listeners a fine service. Produced and directed by William Lally with sound effects from legendary soundman Gene Twombly, these programs feature fine performances and a polished sound not found in all educational programs. *American Gallery* also had star power not usually associated with education programs. Introductions and narrations rotated through a celebrity of the week such as Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Bill Cosby while stars like John Forsythe, Henry Fonda and Richard Widmark each took the lead in one of the weekly productions.

The program's actual date production is unknown, but two things give away the fact that it was after the golden age of radio. The first is Bob Hope's introduction of the Will Rogers tribute when he notes that he spoke with soldiers who hadn't heard of Rogers. His comment was that these soldiers were born ten years after Will Roger's death. Rogers passed away in 1935, so even young soldiers born a decade later couldn't have been serving their country until the sixties. The second is the use of Bill Cosby, unknown until the 60s, to introduce the program on Henry David Thoreau.

American Gallery is an excellent educational experience and twelve of the thirteen episodes are available in mint condition. Each thirty minute episode features the life story of an American notable ranging from Will Rogers to Frank Lloyd Wright. After a heartfelt celebrity introduction, a fine drama unfolds in a series of vignettes that span the length of the subject's life and accomplishments.

While no downloadable copies of *American Gallery* are available, try homeschoolradioshows.com/ for a weekly educational program from old time radio. They sometimes feature Armed Forces Radio Dramas as part of their *Living Books for the Ears* series.

American Heritage

Gentlemen there are five hundred thousand people on the western side of the Rockies... I purpose a weekly mail service...

Narrator: Its name in history is the Pony Express.

Similar to the previous entry, *American Gallery*, *American Heritage* was an Armed Forces Radio production that examined the nation's past. It seems to have been oriented more toward events than people as the two surviving programs discuss the US Constitution and the history of mail. The show on the mail service is listed as the twenty-seventh program, so presumably the series ran for at least a year. Each *American Heritage* is a well done dramatic narrative, but without the full cast of a show like *Adventures in Research*, it comes across as a second rate educational program.

American Portraits

The title *American Portraits* has been used for three different radio series. The first two series aired over NBC in 1938 and 1951 respectively. The title was revived by National Public Radio in 1985. As you would expect from the title, each of these series focused telling the stories of Great Americans. The programs that interest us are NBC's 1951 summer replacement series for *Cavalcade of America*. *American Portraits* was so close to a clone of the show it temporarily replaced that most, if not all, of the scripts were recycled directly from the *Cavalcade of America*. While eight episodes of this solid educational drama are extant, there is no reason to seek them out since over 700 episodes of its superior parent program, *Cavalcade*, are available to collectors.

American Revue

This CBS musical variety program is noted by radio historian Elizabeth McLeod as being the first integrated network series. Ethel Waters provided both the integration and the star power in this short lived vehicle for the American Oil Company. She is backed by the Dorsey Brothers Orchestra while George Beatty provided the bits of comedy scattered through out the show. Two samples of the show from 1933 have survived, the October 22nd program features the first twenty minutes of the show and the November 5th the last ten so between the two you can get a pretty good idea of what it sounded like all the way through. Though a bit scratchy, the fidelity of the recordings is quite good for a show from the early thirties. While Beatty's comedy is notable only for its nostalgic value, listening Waters' powerful voice while she was in her prime is sure to be a treat for music lovers.

American Trail

Son: Dad, go to the vigilance committee!

Wife: Tom please... please wait!

Man: This is the gold coast Virginia, every man makes his own rules, every man is his own judge and jury.

Sponsored by the Veteran's of Foreign War's Ladies Auxiliary, *American Trail* presented the history of the nation in fifteen minute increments. The series focuses not just on the explorers and warriors of the nation, but also the inventors. From the Wright Brother's airplane to McCormick's reaper accounts of invention are interspersed with stories of the California Gold Rush and the Lewis and Clark expedition. The gold rush program has a clever opening as Bing Crosby launches into song and then his son Lenny introduces the crooner. Bing tells the boy about a lad that was just his age in the California of long ago and the story is off and running.

This syndicated series of thirteen shows does a solid job of presenting American history in bit sized chunks. If you enjoy these programs you might like *American Gallery* and *Cavalcade of America*. archive.org/details/otr_americantrail has programs 1-10 and shows 11-13 can be downloaded at archive.org/details/AmericanTrail_191.

American Weekly Program

The American Theater of Radio offers a kaleidoscopic panorama of scenes depicting a graphic illustration of what might just take place should this earth of ours receive a visit from one of these gigantic masses of molten stone...

In 1933, broadcasting's dramatic writers weren't adverse to excessive verbiage. Adapted from stories that appeared in *American Weekly*, which was distributed as a bonus for Hearst newspaper subscribers, this series offered sensationalistic dramas with titles like *When the Comet Strikes* and *The Almost Perfect Crime*. This is not too surprising when you consider the parent magazine was once called by *Time* a "pumped up omelet of cornfield murders, betrayed maidens, prehistoric monsters..." In 1934, the series was re-titled *Front Page Drama* and ran for over a thousand episodes until the curtain rang down in 1954. You can find out more under the *Front Page Drama* heading.

One of the shows oddities is that the announcer proudly mentions that the program was recorded at the General Broadcasting Company studios in New York. History seems to have wiped all mentions of GBC from the history books. It may have been a Hearst attempt to cash in on the burgeoning radio market by competing with NBC.

Five episodes of the series exist from days before the name change and are interesting as broadcast oddities of the yellow press. They are full of urgent drama with rampant overacting and are fun in the same guilty pleasure sort of way that make old style Z grade movies enjoyable. You can hear an episode of *American Theater of Radio* along with a *Half Hour to Kill* show at podcastdirectory.com/podshows/1113670.

American West (see Horizons West)

Americana

When they came to drive the last spike, Mr. Stanford, President of the Central Pacific, took the sledge and the first time he struck he missed the iron and hit the rail. What a howl went up...

This homage to the nation ran over NBC in the mid fifties. It was a wide ranging look at culture as it covered topics from Jazz to Mormons to the Railroads. Thirty episodes of the show have been cataloged by the hard working Old Time Radio Research Group. Unfortunately the only program I have found is the railroad show from October 23rd, 1954. It has an unusually opening with a professor talking about a sound effects record of railroad engines before launching the half hour *Memoirs of a Railroad Century*, a fond look at the steel horse. NBC apparently liked the title as *Americana* was also the name of an NBC-TV quiz show hosted by Ben Grauer in the late fifties.

Americans at Work

The highest price ever realized for a Rembrandt painting was at that particular sale... this one picture brought 270,000 dollars.

Americans at Work was a unique series that featured a profession of the week. A number of folks employed in that week's highlighted vocation would swap stories and answer the moderator's questions about their jobs. The Workers Education Bureau of America contributed to the program which aired after *Columbia Workshop* on CBS during the 1939-40 season. The one available show on auctioneers was preserved when Washington DC radio station WJSV decided to record their entire broadcast day on September 21st, 1939. This 19 hour transcription can be found at archive.org/details/CompleteBroadcastDay.

America's Answer

Utmost care is required in all traffic vehicles, trains, streetcars, buses, taxis, airplanes and such and in all public places, such as theaters, movies and bars...

This 1942 warning about enemy spies listening to your every word is a dull affair with a fifteen minute text read by Perry Woods. His joy at being forced to regurgitate this government missive is masked by a monotone performance devoid of emotion. An amusing moment at the end of the show has the announcer chuckling and rolling the r in Broadcasting as he announces that the program originated from the San Diego Studios of the Columbia Broadcast System. He was apparently as bored as the audience, if any, that was listening to the transcription.

Amos and Andy

George Bernard Shaw: "There are three things which I shall never forget about America -- the Rocky Mountains, Niagara Falls, and 'Amos 'n' Andy.' "

There was a time in America when mentioning *Amos 'n Andy* required no more explanation than invoking the moniker of The Babe or griping about your Tin Lizzy. If it is an overstatement to say that Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll's *Amos 'n Andy* dominated radio in the minds of Americans in the same way that Henry Ford and Babe Ruth dominated the auto industry and sports, it is one of historical perspective. In our minds Jack Benny, the Lone Ranger and others have become the icons of old time radio, while Amos 'n Andy have been consigned to an uncomfortable bin somewhere in the basement of our collective consciousness. We can generally forget the racism of baseball, the Babe never had to face the great black pitchers because of the color line, and early industrialism, Henry Ford was blatantly anti-Semite, but it's hard to ignore two white men playing Harlem Blacks in a rather broad, and to modern ears, demeaning way.

To ears in late twenties and thirties, *Amos 'n Andy* presented an entirely different sound to an America hungry for free escapism. Times were as bad as anyone had ever seen them and putting food on the table left little room for seeing a vaudeville show or an early motion picture. Even for those who could afford such extravagant entertainment, they seemed remote from modern life. Vaudeville was frozen in time using the same routines that had been staples for years, while the motion picture flickered along in a sort of scratchy fantasy land that was just discovering sound.

Amos 'n Andy offered a different kind of escapism, a soap opera in human and sometimes humorous terms. Six days a week the characters invited the struggling working man and his kin to care about them and consider them friends. Their struggles and occasional triumphs or at least escapes might well parallel those of his family. Their troubles made him feel better about his own.

America responded in droves. Movie houses timed their programs for a fifteen minute *Amos n Andy* break and pumped the show into the theater, while the streets outside would be virtually barren as folks sought the nearest radio to hear the next chapter in the lives of Amos, Andy, the Kingfish and all the rest of the gang. Officially a third of young America was listening to Amos and Andy as the 1930s struggled to a sputtering start, unofficially everyone knew of the boys.

Like *Fibber McGee and Molly* and the *National Barn Dance*, *Amos 'n Andy* was birthed in the budding radio scene of Chicago. Charles Correll met Freeman Gosden in 1920, give or take a year, when both of them were laboring for the Joe Bren Producing Company. The Company, which organized amateur talent shows for church groups, fraternal orders and the like, sent both men to Durham, North Carolina to work on a show for the local Elks club. The two became friends and then partners, as they supplemented their income by appearing on stage as a song and dance team. Within a few years their company assigned them to run the circus division out of Chicago. This fortuitous transfer set in motion an amazing radio career. Gosden and Correll became the endmen for Joe Bren's minstrel shows over WLS in 1924 and later did a song and patter act for WEBH. This station couldn't afford to pay the two, instead giving them free meals at a local restaurant that advertised on the station.

WGN, the Chicago Tribune's radio voice, came calling in 1925 and the two went into radio full time. At first the men continued their song and patter routines as they helped the station fill the long broadcast days. They even helped cover the Kentucky Derby on May 16th. As 1926 dawned, there was talk of the duo creating a daily serial program based on the popular Tribune comic strip, *The Gumps*. This never materialized,

however Gosden and Correll liked the idea of a daily serial. They developed the idea of having two black men come up to Chicago from the south to try their luck in the big city. The station went along with the idea and *Sam 'n Henry* was born. The pair debuted on January 12th, 1926 with plenty of buildup in the Tribune which said "The funniest ten minutes ever are in store for radio fans this evening with the first appearance over W-G-N... of "Sam 'n Henry," the two characters in the station's new radio comic strip."

This new "radio comic strip" became a Chicago obsession in only a few weeks. In fact the show was so popular that Victor Records released a number of skits as albums. These albums apparently gave Gosden a novel idea. Why not record all the skits and release them to radio stations across the country? They could be played at the same time on each station and Gosden and Correll could extend the popularity of *Sam 'n Henry* across the nation like they had in Chicago. There was only one sticking point. WGN refused.

Gosden fought with the station and threatened to let his contract with the station expire if they didn't allow his syndication idea. The station thought he was bluffing since they owned the name and concept of the show. On December 18th, 1927, Gosden and Correll did their final *Sam 'n Henry* and left for a tour of the South. According to Elizabeth McLeod, WGN hired two dialect actors to continue the show in Gosden and Correll's absence. The two would never come back to the Tribune station however. They inked a contract in mid February with WGN's arch rival WMAQ. This contract included the understanding that their "chainless chain" syndication idea would be allowed by their new bosses. Q was thrilled to score the major coup of picking up their rival's top show and had no objection to this new idea of syndication. On March 19th, 1928 a new Gosden and Correll show debuted on WMAQ and 38 other stations. Its name was *Amos n Andy*.

This syndication effort lasted until August 19th, 1929 when it was cut short by success. *Amos n Andy* had become so popular that the NBC network became the boys' new home. Ironically the program could have become a CBS feature. WMAQ was the CBS affiliate and *Amos 'n Andy* was pitched to the network, but Columbia head man Bill Paley made the mistake of a lifetime when he couldn't see any reason to put the serialized adventures of two black southerners on his national radio network. NBC was more perceptive and along with legendary advertising maestro Albert Lasker, head of Lord and Thomas, put the series on the air for the dying toothpaste brand, Pepsodent.

By 1930, the show was a national obsession. In a perfect merger of luck and skill, Gosden and Correll perfected the radio serial and launched the prototype for modern network programming. The continuing story lines, everyman characters and touches of humor foreshadowed the forms for soap operas, adventure serials and to some extent the sitcom that are still used today. In 1930-31, the program enjoyed success that has never been duplicated. Fully a third of America listened to the nightly adventures of these two black men who moved to New York with the advent of the network show. Their adventures were reported in newspapers and became the next day conversation for vast portions of the country. Imagine the Super Bowl played nightly and you will have some idea of the sustained popularity of *Amos 'n Andy*.

After drawing the biggest audience in radio history in the early thirties, the *Amos and Andy Show* saw its audience gradually slip away as the decade rolled along. Competition became fierce as imitators of their show began to pop up across the dial and many other forms of the serial became popular. The romantic serial, adventure serial and

children's serial and other forms splintered the market for continuing daily drama. Meanwhile the sitcom began its blossom in the middle thirties, with Jack Benny and Fibber McGee and Molly leading the way.

By the early 40s it was decided to retool the show into a weekly half hour sitcom. This was an immediate success. It featured guest stars, supporting actors and was performed before a studio audience. New writers were brought in to relieve Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, *Amos 'n Andy*'s sole writers and performers, of the writing duties. A full orchestra was added and the show took on a Hollywood flair. This version returned the boys to a prominent place in the radio ratings and lasted a dozen years.

It was an amazing transformation from a largely dramatic series, more working class soap opera then comedy, with an intense sense of immediacy to a full realized mainstream sitcom. An argument can be made either way on which version of *Amos 'n Andy* was the better.

The first version created a national sensation with its carefully crafted tales of modern life seen through the eyes of two loveable, struggling commoners. Its style was widely copied, but never equaled, though some argue *Lum 'n Abner* came closest in its hillbilly charm.

The second version retained the characters and the setting, but little else. It was a simply a reasonably funny sitcom featuring black characters, sort of. The white creators of *Amos and Andy*, Gosden and Correll still played the major parts, but surrounded themselves with African American character actors. The characters had become so engrained in American society that not many seemed worried about the white men playing black controversy that had flared in the early thirties and simply accepted it as another sitcom. Writers Joe Connelly and Bob Mosher turned out fine scripts, maybe there finest depending on your view of the comedy evidenced in *Leave It To Beaver* and *The Munsters* which they would later pen together. There are plenty of laughs and guest stars, but somehow it never seems to rise to the level of the great comedies such as the *Benny, Harris or Fibber and Molly* shows.

One of the huge changes to the show was the elevation of the Kingfish. He gradually took over the second lead position from Amos who would gradually recede to the role of friend and conscience. The Kingfish role of greedy agitator who often got Andy neck deep in problems and active foil to Andy was far better suited to a sitcom than was Amos more passive role as the married and stable half of the taxi company with his long suffering attitude toward wayward friend Andy. In fact some of the funniest shows of the sitcom series are those that feature Kingfish as the lead character. He seems to be the perfect comedic anti-hero. As his greedy and petty larceny collapse on him bringing down the weight of the world on his head, he frantic struggles to extricate himself leave us both laughing and somehow feeling a bit sorry for the big lug.

Ironically, except for the *Jack Benny Show*, the boys translated to television better than any of the radio sitcoms. *Amos and Andy* was one of the huge hits of the tube of plenty, just as they had been the drawing card of early radio decades before. This version used some of the finest African American actors and recycled many of the radio scripts to good effect. Like the later radio shows, the TV *Amos and Andy* was also controversial, as activist groups found that while it employed top flight African American actors, it furthered racial stereotypes. It was pulled from the network and later even the seemingly eternal reruns were yanked unceremoniously from syndication.

Whether taste and social reaction to the show result in a personal appreciation or distaste for *Amos 'n Andy*, the historical significance of the series cannot be overlooked. It simply redefined radio. Before the program, the new medium was testing formats like light opera, song and patter shows and big band concerts with music the main form of entertainment. Most spoken word programs were lectures or live coverage of important political speeches or news events. After the program, story telling dominated the airwaves through the golden age of radio with musical offerings relegated to a much smaller role.

You can listen to Gosden and Correll in character as *Sam 'n Henry* from Victor recordings that date as early as 1926. While not actual air recordings, these three to three and half minute sketches still make interesting listening for anyone interested in mid-1920s radio. The characters are already well defined and listening to the brief sketches makes you wonder how radio history would have changed if *Sam 'n Henry* had been syndicated rather than *Amos 'n Andy*. As you might expect from records this old, there is a fair amount of surface noise and some distortion, but they are still quite listenable.

Over 30 recordings of *Amos 'n Andy* have been preserved from their syndicated run in the late thirties. These vary wildly in quality and some are very difficult to listen through. They are likely to be more historically interesting than outright entertaining, as hearing bits and pieces of a continuing serial makes it difficult to follow any storylines. After the jump to network radio, the number of available shows dwindles to a handful until the 1943 switch to a weekly sitcom format. These half hour shows are available in abundance with something like 250 programs available.

Favorite programs include:

The Christmas show, from December 23rd, 1947, though it could be almost any of the Christmas Shows from the sitcom years. The script was used virtually unchanged for every Amos and Andy Christmas show in the sitcom phase of the series. The program breaks down into two parts that are almost unrelated. In the first portion, Andy, by now the major character in the show, wants to get a lovely gift for the daughter of his best friend Amos. He knows that little Arbadella wants a wonderful doll that she saw in the department store window and he determines to earn the money to buy it for her. The second features Amos with his yearly explanation of the Lord's Prayer to his daughter as the orchestra plays and sings the prayer softly in the background.

The fifteen minute serial shows from May 20, 21 and 23, 1929. Competition in the form of Earl Dixon and his cab company moves across the street from our boys. Their Fresh Air Taxi service is already struggling enough without any more cabs in the area and when the Kingfish of their lodge gets a little too friendly with the newcomer, Amos and Andy see red.

Any of the first half hour sitcoms from 1943 are fun to listen to as they feature a fine assortment of guest stars. Walton Huston gives a memorable performance as a judge in a wonderful courtroom scene on the October 22nd show. Peter Lorrie's appearance on November 5th makes for a fun show as his horror tinged voice adds to the comedy proceedings. Andy and the Kingfish try to leverage their possession of a trunk Lorrie wants into big bucks.

You can find programs from the early serial run at archive.org/details/AmosNAndyEarlyEpisodes.
archive.org/details/amosandy1 has a fair sampling of programs.

Imagine

Three quarters of a century removed from the rise of broadcasting in America, it is hard to understand the Amos and Andy phenomena. To appreciate the boys appeal, try taking a step back to the days of your grandparents or possibly your great grandparents and imagine a world without broadcasting in any form. A world where the newspaper has been the only form of daily media for a hundred years.

You are a child of the new technological age, Henry Ford's fabulous Motor Car, the daring fighter pilots of the Great War and the flickering images on the Silver Screen define your generation. Then a new machine is introduced, the radio. At first it is a novelty, with only sporadic broadcasts, scratchy and ill defined. Then stations and even entire networks of stations begin to broadcast on a regular basis. Classical music is the mainstay, with occasional dramatic works and cackling vaudevillians offer a change of pace.

Then one evening about seven o'clock you were fiddling with your tuning knob, hoping to find something different, when you came to WGN and the voices of two men filled the room. They were having trouble with their taxi cab company, troubles anyone could relate to in this time of economic woe. They chatted about their problems, just the way you chatted to your friends, but with a bit more wit and color. It was amazing really; these two colored boys stepped into your home every evening and simply chatted. There was nothing pretensions about them, if anything their woes made you feel better about your own. They wanted nothing from you, except a moment of your time to mention the nice folks who paid for the airtime, but gave you their time to entertain and entrance you. Something was always going on in their world, something interesting and entertaining. Sam 'n Henry soon became your friends and you told your real life friends about them. You and your friends followed the boys when they jumped to WMAQ in early 29 and chuckled at their name change. They became Amos and Andy and retold bits of their history, the better bits.

A year and a half later you and even more of your friends followed Amos and Andy to NBC Blue, when they made the jump to the fledgling nation network and to Harlem from Chicago. Suddenly everyone knew about them. You chuckled often when folks would tell you about this 'new' program they had found and urged you to listen. It was wonderful and different they told you, these were friends coming into your home every evening and you nodded. Soon you could take a walk down any street in town when Amos 'n Andy were on, not that you would and not miss a word as every house on the street had their radio tuned to your two friends made good. The radio polls said 40 or the 120 million people in America listened to them. You knew hundreds of the 40 millions who listened, but only a few of the other 80 million. Whoever they were you felt sorry for them.

Christmas Show

The Amos and Andy Christmas Show was an American institution. It began in 1940, when the show was fading in its fifteen minute form. Amos had married his longtime sweetheart Ruby in 1935 and became the father to a baby girl who went by the

somewhat unlikely name of Arbadella. On the Christmas show of 1940, Amos was portrayed sitting beside the bed of his young daughter and explaining the Lord's Prayer.

Every year after that, Amos would go through the prayer line by line, altering between the text of the prayer and his explanation to his daughter. His closing commentary went something like this:

"For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen.' That means, Darlin,' that all the world and everything that's in it belongs to God's kingdom. Everything. Your Mommy, your Daddy, your little brother, your Grandma, you and everybody. And as we know that, and act as if we do know it, my dear daughter. That is the real spirit of Christmas."

Especially during the early years of the forties, this message of Christian love resonated with a hurting nation. Many shows tried to capture the elusive spirit of Christmas with programs revolving around topics such as seasonal shopping, lost gifts and the popular tradition of returning gifts. None of them managed this feat as well as Amos and Andy's The Lord's Prayer and Lionel Barrymore's A Christmas Carol and these two became the Christmas evergreens of classic American Radio.

According to TVParty.com, Freeman F. Gosden, Jr., the son of one of the creators, said this about the Christmas Program's rendition of the Lord's Prayer. "It is probably safe to conclude that more people heard Amos' description of the Lord's Prayer than that of anyone else in the world. There is no question that he felt this was his proudest lifetime achievement. We would go to the studio and watch the show from the client's booth. Then Dad would bring the recording home and after dinner play it over and over again until midnight, with tears in his eyes."

The Christmas show tradition continued through the Amos and Andy format change to a half hour sitcom, airing on the show immediately before Christmas, and even made the transition to Television on the short lived Amos and Andy sitcom on that medium.

Syndication

One sometimes overlooked contribution to radio from Gosden and Correll is the concept of syndication. When *Sam 'n Henry* became the hottest property in Chicago radio, Victor records released albums featuring the two. The budding entrepreneurs realized that they could take this recording idea a step farther. By releasing records to many stations for simulations airings, they could garner far more listeners and hence more money. WGN disagreed and the performers and the station parted company over the issue. Gosden and Correll's next station WMAQ agreed to the syndication idea as part of a deal that landed them Chicago's top radio attractions.

For the *Amos n Andy* debut in 1928, transcription disks that were sent to 38 radio stations as part of the first syndication show in radio history. Before Amos and Andy were picked up on the NBC Blue network, they had created what Gosden and Correll referred to as a 'chainless chain' for Amos and Andy that exceeded 100 radio stations. The shows were prerecorded and syndicated to dozens of stations on fragile 12 inch records where they were played at the same time as parent station WMAQ played their broadcast. This was the start of radio syndication.

As radio stations began to liven the American soundscape by the hundreds, the demand for high quality material sky rocketed. Network radio covered some of this demand, but there were hundreds of unaffiliated stations and even network stations needed to fill dozens of hours a week with non-network programming. Syndication companies arose to fill the need. Some like the Transcription Company of America recorded 'live' band concerts that could be used over and over to fill unsponsored hours in the long broadcast day. Others tried to cash in on the *Amos 'n Andy* fueled serial craze with either direct imitation of the pair or variant serials that emphasized action or mystery often in an exotic location. *Tarzan of the Apes*, *Speed Gibson* and *Ann of the Airlines* are a few of the many shows that were syndicated in this way.

Syndicated transcription disks have proved a boon for old time radio collectors. Very few of the networks or radio stations bothered with sound checks in the earliest days of radio, so much of live network radio has been lost to the ages. Most of what was recorded on the network level rots unheard in the archives of the Library of Congress at the behest of NBC. However syndicated disks were often archived by the radio stations or taken by the employees after they had been aired, so many of them have landed in the hands of radio enthusiasts.

Anderson Family

Neighbor: I'll sue and take everything you have, Anderson!

Mr. Anderson: Ah don't tell me what you're gonna do.

Junior: Uh oh, here we go again folks.

The Anderson Family was a 1947 syndicated sitcom that is mostly notable for appearances by great character actor and "child impersonator" Walter Tetley in the role of Junior. Unfortunately Tetley was merely a supporting player to father, Mr. Oliver Anderson played by Dick Oliver, and sometimes missed entire shows. Next door neighbor Homer Miester often aided in the disaster of the week plots, while loving wife Mary Anderson offered advice.

As with many syndicated shows, *The Anderson Family* couldn't match the network programs in the quality or scripts or acting. Writer Howard Swartz tried to create *Father Knows Best* style comedy from Mr. Anderson's inability to cope with any problem more complex than tying his shoes. Unfortunately the plots sound hackneyed and actor Dick Oliver played his role with the style and vocal delivery of a sixty year old who sounded more like Mary Anderson's father than her husband. Instead of imagining the madcap antics of a young father, we have the image of a retiree battered senseless by life's problems.

While not top flight entertainment, the program does have some funny moments and should be interesting for comedy veterans who have already heard all the major sitcoms. Newcomers to the radio sitcom will probably find the *Phil Harris Show* or *Life of Riley* the best Father gets into trouble comedies, while the husband feuding with the next door neighbor genre was handled best during the Gildersleeve years of *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

oldtimeradio-in-tx.homedns.org/otr/Anderson%20Family/ has 12 *Anderson Family* shows available for streaming.

Walter Tetley

Years before television's Dick Clarke stole his gimmick, character actor Walter Tetley managed to remain radio's perpetual teenager. Along with the *Aldrich Family's* Ezra Stone, Tetley defined the role of the teenage boy during radio's golden age.

Tetley's life was laced with irony. He started as a child entertainer and was working in radio by the early thirties when he was still a teen. Eventually it became apparent that he was never going to achieve puberty. A hormonal condition stunted both his physical growth and his vocal maturity. While this was a devastating blow to the young man, it created his career. With the voice of a teenager, but the skill of a mature actor, Walter Tetley became the most prolific 'child impersonator' on the air. He appeared in every type of program from top sitcoms like *The Jack Benny Show* and *Fibber McGee and Molly* to dramas such as *Suspense*.

The first of his iconic teenage roles began in 1941 as he portrayed Leroy on *The Great Gildersleeve*. The character began the series as an all American boy just entering his teenage years and gradually aged into his late teens by the end of the twelve season run. Leroy was one of the least stereotyped and best written teenagers on the air. While he found his share of trouble and enjoyed needling his Uncle Gildersleeve, he also loved his family deeply and when trouble threatened stood up for his sister, uncle and their maid, Birdy. Tetley did a wonderful job as Leroy. He gave the character a full range of emotions in radio's world of often one dimensional teens. You could feel Leroy's pain when life or his Uncle give him a raw deal and sense his joy when he triumphs against the odds stacked against any 1940s radio teenager.

Even as he enjoyed the success of his role on Gildersleeve, Tetley found another defining role on the *Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show*. As the insufferable grocery boy Julies Abruzio he held his own with the brilliant comedian Phil Harris and his sidekick Remley, played by radio legend Elliot Lewis. Harris and Remley often plotted dastardly traps for young Abruzio as they tried to lock him in a meat freezer or trap him in a smoke filled room to test Phil's fire fighting abilities. Julies got even however pushing the two out a second story window to 'save' them from the fire or plotting with a friend at the motor vehicle department to drive Phil nuts when he applied for his license. While the Julius character wasn't as deep as Gildersleeve's Leroy, the role gave Tetley the opportunity to play even funnier character along side one of radio's best comedy teams.

The third role that brought Tetley fame was that of Sherman, on the Peabody segments of the *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*. Along the way he became famous for brief appearances in a myriad of movies as a hotel bagboy and stayed busy as a voiceover artist specializing in young voices.

An interesting, but definitely not G rated blog, about Tetley can be found at blog.wfmu.org/freeform/2007/03/heya_mister_the.html. Bear Manor put out a book on Walter Tetley's life entitled *For Corns Sake*. You can find out more about this book and many others on old time radio at bearmanormedia.bizland.com/.

Andre Kostalanetz

He gained his name on his turn of the century birth in Saint Petersburg, Russia and he gained his fame as the father of American easy listening music. Like many of the

more artistic Russians of his day, Andre Kostalanetz and his family found it wise to immigrate to America not long after the Czar fell to the Revolution. The talented young conductor quickly found work as an accompanist and then assistant conductor at the Met after his US arrival in 1922. When CBS began their forays into light classical and gentle orchestral music two years later, he picked up the baton for the network's orchestra.

By the thirties, *Andre Kostalanetz Presents* was a top musical program with the 65 piece orchestra seamlessly mixing light opera, short classical pieces and gentle versions of popular hits. Later the show was billed as *Andre Kostalanetz and his Music that Millions Love* and featured his love, wife Lilly Pons. It was muzak for its day and Kostalanetz would continue to record his beautiful music style well into the 70s, selling tens of millions of albums along the way.

The one show that still exists is a bit difficult to listen to and will probably only appeal to fans of Kostalanetz and Pons. Many of his albums can be culled from thrift or old record stores, since over 50 million were sold. These offer a much better listening experience for anyone who wants to hear the arrangements of the father of easy listening.

Andrews Sisters

As one of the most successful sister acts of all time, Laverne, Maxene and Patty conquered both Broadway and Hollywood and sold almost 100 million albums. Not bad for three Minnesota sisters whose father thought show biz wasn't an honorable profession and wanted his daughters to become secretaries. Whatever chance Papa Andrews had at steering his daughters to secretarial school vanished thanks to that new invention, the radio. Everyone has their musical heroes and for the sisters Andrews it was the close harmony of the Boswell Sisters that provided inspiration. Martha, Connie and Vet Boswell rose to fame after they came to New York in 1930 and began to appear on the radio. Amazingly for the time, Connie did her singing from a wheelchair. The teenage Andrews girls fell in love with the close harmonies and jazz stylings of the older sister trio and began to mimic them.

The sisters began their own professional career touring with Larry Rich's orchestra and vaudeville troupe. On a cold November day in 1931, the three girls and six other Minneapolis youngsters boarded a bus bound for Atlanta to join the 300 pound Rich on the RKO circuit. According to *The Andrews Sisters* by Harry Nimmo, Laverne wrote a letter to a friend explaining that the sisters were featured in six trio numbers during the program and that she was playing with the orchestra. Interestingly for old time radio fans she also wrote. "We broadcasted last night. We sang "Huckleberry Finn" and "It's a Girl" with the show. We were the only new ones from Minneapolis that broadcasted with the show." During their time with Larry Rich they used the Boswell Sisters arrangements and style as they learn the ropes of show business. After leaving Rich the girls moved to New York where they were joined by their mother. They found work touring the country with dance bands, but were left stranded in Denver when Ted Mack's Band left the city without them. They managed to get back the Big Apple, but father Peter decided that they needed a bit more direction so he came to New York to shepherd his daughters.

The trio began touring as a sister act in Peter's big 1929 Buick. Hopefully the car was comfortable; they were in it quite a lot. In Chicago they appeared with Georgie Jessel in the World's Fair. After their stint at the Fair, the family bounced around the West and

the Midwest appearing in any club that would hire them for a few dollars a night. March of 1935 saw them in Vancouver and by November 1935 the sisters were appearing in the Fort Worth, Texas Riverside Club where they were featured on live radio remotes. This was followed by a tour of the Midwest and then a journey back to Texas for an engagement with Leon Belasco's Band at the Dallas Adolphus Hotel. According to *Swing It!: The Andrews Sisters Story* by John Sforza, the Andrews Sisters made their first commercial recordings with the Belasco band just before the Dallas appearances.

After a tour with Belasco and a trip home, Andrews Sisters settled in New York in 1937 finding sporadic work in the city. Vic Schoen who had befriended the trio when they all worked for Belasco got the sisters an audition with his new bandleader Billy Swanson. The hotel owner liked the trio and insisted that Swanson hire them for the hotel's weekly radio broadcast, *Saturday Night Swing Club* even though the bandleader was unimpressed by the sisters' singing. Unfortunately the owner had to leave town so Swanson fired the girls after they made their first appearance on the program. Fortunately one broadcast was all it took. David Kapp, headed of A&R at Decca records, heard the sisters as he was riding in a taxi cab and had the girls brought to his office. Signing a contract with Decca was the turning point in their career and the best move Kapp ever made. Within a year the sisters skyrocketed to success on the strength of a Yiddish tune, *Bei Mir Bist du Schoen* translated to the English *To Me, You are Beautiful*. The record sold a million copies and the ladies never had to tour the Midwest in their father's car again.

Before their career was through they would place 46 songs in the Billboard Top 10, that's more than Elvis or the Beatles, appear in 17 films, conquer the theatrical worlds of America and Europe and become major television guests for all the big shows.

Of course another medium they did fairly well in was radio. After helping to jumpstart their careers, radio gave them plenty of chances to shine. The sisters were musical attractions on programs for both Dole Pineapple and Chesterfield and appeared many times with Bing Crosby with whom they also recorded 47 singles and Bob Hope. The three sisters' own radio show kicked off on New Year's Eve 1944 for Nash-Kelvinator. Oddly there are two distinct Andrews Sisters radio shows, which followed each other in quick succession for the same sponsor on the same network. The first was a Sunday afternoon series called *Eight to the Bar Ranch*, which lasted until September of 1945 and featured the perennial western side kick Gabby Hayes. The second series, *NK Musical Showcase*, aired on Wednesday nights starting October 1945 and included a guest of the week doing their most famous act. This program lasted until March 1946.

The programs feature lots of singing and a laundry list of guests from the musical friends like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, to the comedic, Bob Hope, Abbott and Costello and even Donald Duck. In addition to music from the sisters, Curt Massey can be heard crooning on every show. The shows from the first series are western themed and revolve a bit more around humor, while the programs from the second series have more music and the guest appearances are a best-of act by the guest artist. Programs from both series are available; however you will have to put up with significant surface noise on most of the surviving shows. If you enjoy the swing singing and close harmonies of the world's best selling sister act sprinkled with a generous helping of comedy and a plethora of guest, it is worth struggling through the sometimes noisy audio.

The sisters' first show with the odd couple pairing of Bing Crosby and Gabby Hayes stands out as a favorite. The two have a raging comedic debate about who knows more about horses, Bing the racehorse owner who can't buy a winner or Gabby the eternal second banana who claims he roomed with Trigger.

Andy Russell Show

Andy: Hello everybody. Here we are again with another session of singing swinging and music.

Best known for his stint as the temporary replacement for Frank Sinatra on *Your Hit Parade*, Andy Russell had a respectable career as a pop singer and balladeer for Columbia Records during the forties. In addition to his brief reign as the Hit Parade host, Russell had several radio shows of his own, *The Old Gold Show* in 1944 and *The Andy Russell Show* in 1947. He made a number of appearances on the new medium of television including guest spots on *Your Show of Shows*, but as the fifties rolled along his style of music gave way to the backbeat of rock and roll.

Fortunately Russell had a career option available to few fading pop stars. He had been born Andres Rabago Perez, one of ten children of Mexican immigrants, and was just as fluent in Spanish as he was in English. So Andy moved to Mexico and later South America to continue his career. He became a hit in Argentina with a television variety show and revived his musical career. Eventually he returned to the states and recorded albums for both the US and Spanish American Markets.

As is sometimes the case, Andy Russell is more interesting as a man than as an old time radio performer. An episode or two of the fifteen minute *Andy Russell Show* still exist and feature pleasant musical numbers. While competently done they are probably not worth seeking out unless you are a fan of Mr. Russell or an avid collector of musical radio programs.

Ann of the Airlanes

Announcer (over sound effects of airplane and wind): Over valley and mountain, river and plain, through wind and storm rides Ann the Airlanes.

Of the dozen syndicated programs that showcased adventures in aviation during the 1930s, *Anne of the Airlines* was the only one to feature a female protagonist, well sort of. While Interstate Airlines hostess Ann Burton was featured prominently in this weekly serial, she was actually part of a trio of secret service adventurers that included her boyfriend, pilot Jack Baker and co-pilot Art Morrison. The syndicators probably felt that the program could feed off the popularity of Amelia Earhart if they named it for the female lead. They were probably right as along with Speed Gibson and Jimmy Allen, Ann Burton forms the trifecta 'best preserved airplane serials of the thirties'. Not much is known about the serial except that it was recorded in the early thirties, possibly 1932, and that hard working character actor Gerald Mohr, apparently played Art Morrison.

Gerald Mohr was one of radio's lesser known success stories. As a teen, he was discovered by Andre Baruch when he was in the hospital with appendicitis. This led to a

stint as a CBS correspondent. Gerald had planned on a career in medicine but he succumbed to the acting bug and by the early thirties had begun to work with Orson Wells' Mercury Theatre troupe. In addition to his Broadway work, he continued to appear behind the microphone. His most memorable radio performance was a three season turn as Phillip Marlow from 48-51. Mohr's good looks, a radio rarity, helped the young thespian into a screen career. His silver screen debut was on the serial *Jungle Girl* for Republic Pictures in 1941. After serving in the military during the second world war he returned to the screen in a series of films as the Lone Wolf.

When television came calling in the fifties, Mohr answered, but in an unexpected way. He suffered an injury that left him with a scarred face, this left him as a flawed but still handsome actor who had the perfect look for the dashing, hard living villains that were needed to combat the likes of Bret Maverick and Cheyenne Bodie. With his acting skill, decades of experience and excellent horsemanship, Gerald Mohr became one of the small screens most in demand western villains.

Mohr's fellow actors on *Ann of the Airlanes* are unknown and apparently faded away after their starring roles on the serial. Like most serials, *Ann of the Airlines* features drama and fair amount of action in each twelve minute episode. The show is well acted, a fun listen and fairly well preserved given its extreme age. Dozens of the sixty five original recordings still exist and are worth downloading from

archive.org/details/AnnoftheAirlanes.

For further reading material on the airplane programs on old time radio go to mwotrc.com/rr2006_02/inttheair.htm. You can find much more on Gerald Mohr at the fine fan-site lindawood.bravehost.com./

Anson Weeks

San Francisco radio and the Anson Weeks Orchestra both sprang to life in the mid 1920s and each assisted the other along the way. Weeks formed his musical aggregation in 1924 and within a few years could be heard on nightly radio programs all along the California coast. By 1930 he and his band had settled into the Hotel Mark Hopkins and onto the NBC West Coast Network for programs that sometimes aired five times a week. A year later, the young band leader had program called the *Lucky Strike Magic Carpet* on the coast to coast network. Through the years, the orchestra featured many future stars including Xavier Cougat, Bob Crosby and a young lady singer named Dale Evans.

Anson Weeks career suffered a set back in the mid thirties when the bandleader was severely injured in a traffic accident. While it took many years, he battled back to rejoin his band in the forties. As big bands faded in the mid forties, Weeks created a new career for himself in California real estate.

Several Anson Weeks programs from the early thirties have survived and feature pleasant sounding music and a bit of patter. One of the great virtual museums on the web has more on Anson Weeks' radio career at sfmuseum.net/hist1/weeks.html. The site also has a number of downloadable mp3s dating from the early 30s.

Answer Man

Do Indians have beards? How high are sky writing letter? How much does my skin weigh? How far does a grasshopper travel in a day?

For almost two decades, Albert Mitchell, better known as the *Answer Man*, fielded questions ranging from the common to the esoteric to the downright bizarre. His weekday program for New York's WOR was a simple fifteen minutes of rapid-fire answers to listener questions, yet something about Mr. Information captured the audience fancy. *Answer Man* was carried on the Mutual Network for much of its run, syndicated across the country and franchised to England, France and other European countries.

According to *Time*, twenty five hundred letters a day poured into the show's Manhattan headquarters where producer Bruce Chapman and his staff answered each one, signing them all Albert Mitchell, The Answer Man. They came to rely on a "postal panel of 20,000 obliging experts" and the endless stack of books in the enormous collection of the New York Public Library which happened to be across the street. Some questions could only be answered by experimentation and Chapman was always prepared add some elbow grease to his research when the question demanded it. One of the best research stories has Sam Snead driving a golf ball through a phone book to prove it could be done.

The odd thing about the series is that even though it ran daily from 1937 until 1956 and was syndicated for portions of that time, almost no shows have survived. J. David Golden has only eleven programs listed in his exhaustive Goldindex of Old Time Radio and only one of these, the Thanksgiving show is in common circulation. Then again maybe it isn't so unusual when you consider that *American Forum of the Air*, the first great interview show is also represented by only one existing program. At any rate, the November 23rd, 1944 program is a pleasant excursion into Thanksgiving lore a fair representation of what *The Answer Man* sounded like.

Anthology

Slow, rich voice reading in sing song: The strong men keep coming on, they go down shot, hanged, sick, broken, they live on fighting..

Announcer: You are listening to the voice of Carl Sandberg reading his poem *Upstream* a page from this afternoon's edition of Anthology.

In dawning glow of the nineteen hundreds when a young medium called radio was just learning to toddle and to talk, scripture reading, poetry and classical music were the popular choices for brief broadcasts into the ether. The transmitter owner and sometimes his family and friends would gather around the microphone to entertain the fortunate radio enthusiasts who could tune through the static to hear an actual broadcast. Any entertainment was exciting when radio was young be it a violin solo or a passage from the Psalms. As radio grew older and more formalized, populist entertainment like the serial and the sitcom generally replaced these early radio forms, however some individual stations began to specialize exclusively in Christian or Classical programming for those who loved Christ or Bach. Poetry however generally faded from view except as a touch of spice to a comedic or dramatic offering.

A rare exception to this lyrical dearth was *Anthology*. Emanating from New York's WNBC in the mid fifties, this program featured readings by poets such as Carl Sandburg and Edna Saint Vincent Millay as well as performances by celebrities ranging from movie stars to baseball managers. Virtually all of the performances save for those of the host and the occasional in studio guest were prerecorded. Some of these recordings seem to have been made specifically for the program while others were from commercial spoken word recordings. The programs were often thematic, featuring the poetry of France, Baseball or Thanksgiving. Producer Steve White and writer / director Draper Lewis did a fine job of assembling these poetic excursions, while Harry Fleetwood's relaxed but knowledgeable style of announcing made the programs listenable to folks who would not generally attend poetry readings.

The same style served Fleetwood well in his three decade career as a nighttime classical music institution in New York. After serving in the military and then working in Pennsylvania radio in the forties, Harry was hired from some 1,500 applicants to helm *Music Through the Night* on WNBC in 1953. New York seemed to fall in love his smooth witty style. According to *Time*, Charles Osgood called him "so wonderfully civilized", while David Duball, who hired Fleetwood for WNCN, said his style was "straightforward but extremely intimate." The announcer moved to WNCN after twenty years on WNBC and continued his education of classically minded New Englanders well into the eighties.

Anthology will not suit everyone's tastes. Those, like your author, with an ear for tradition old time radio offerings such as sitcoms or dramas will probably want to pass this series by. Listeners who enjoy more cultured offerings will find this program a godsend and thrill to the prospect of famed poets reading their own works. The holiday programs are probably the most interesting as *Anthology* does a fine job of capturing the spirit of the seasons.

Arch Oboler's Plays

Joe: I'd won! I'd won! I'd caught up with time again.
The sun. It was dawn.
It was dawn. For the world... and for me.

A writer / director who helped create and define the field of suspense in his medium. He introduced new storytelling techniques and refined the technical side of his presentations beyond anything that had gone before. Thanks to his stylish sense of terror, he developed a cult following and many imitators, though some dismissed him as a one note director who never moved beyond the field of thrillers. If this were a book on film this entry would feature Alfred Hitchcock and if the subject were Television, Rod Serling. Since radio is our topic, Arch Oboler is our focus.

Aside from inclusion a generic description as a father of suspense in his field, Hitchcock bears little resemblance to Oboler, however Serling's career matches Oboler's in an uncanny fashion. Both were influenced by Norman Corwin and tried to weave a social message into their horrific plots. Both dabbled in the other's medium. Rod Serling started his writing career at radio station WLW, while Arch Oboler saw some scripts adapted to television and created a brief humor anthology for the picture box. Both are

remembered almost exclusively today for a horror anthology series, Oboler's *Lights Out* and Serling's *Twilight Zone*. Both tried to move beyond these series, with all the success of Leonard Nimoy try to escape Spock. Both hosted a second horror series, *Arch Oboler's Plays* and *Night Gallery* respectively and both used their past experience to work with limited success in film. I suspect that any future broadcast medium will attract an Oboler or a Serling, a creative force who focuses on the dark side of humanity in new and surprising ways. Sam Raimi is already placing his bid to be the internet version as he collaborates with FEARnet on several horror series. Oboler's role in radio had to be filled by someone and Arch happened to be the man.

He filled that role well as both writer and director. With a style of "writing" that involved lying in bed while acting out his creations into his Dictaphone as they sprang to mind, it isn't surprising that his scripts bear a casual, sometimes stream of consciousness, style. As you would expect from such a style, the protagonist is fully featured and the plots scream through the city streets like bank robbers making a getaway, taking the corners on just enough rubber to keep them earth bound. What is unexpected is the level of prose in many of Oboler's stories. This is especially true of *Arch Oboler's Plays* where a more mature Oboler than the man who frightened the populace with *Light's Out* is often trying to deliver a stern warning about the Nazis to a slumbering America. In *The Ivory Tower* and *Johnny Got His Gun*, the writer goes far beyond the horror genre to create powerful stories that are relevant for those battling any totalitarian regime.

As a director too, Arch Oboler was a success. The timing of his shows was impeccable and like Wyllis Cooper who preceded him on *Lights Out*, Arch was a master of the sound effect. His style with actors was confrontational, rather than sit through rehearsals the rather short Oboler would sometimes climb on tables or ladders and shout instructions to his cast. He preferred veteran radio actors to the sometimes mic shy prima donnas of Hollywood and even when he did indulge in a filmic guest star, he treated them like just another cast member. While this style limited the number of celebrities who appeared on his shows, those that did appear turned in memorable performances.

Fans of the suspense genre will appreciate virtually all of Arch Oboler's work and even those who might cringe at the black visions of *Lights Out* may appreciate a number of the episodes of the more mature *Arch Oboler's Plays*. While some are dated, others remain surprisingly timeless perhaps because as Arch told the *Times*, "I wrote about human beings, not about special effects." Jimmy Cagney's turn in the finely written *Johnny's Got His Gun*, *The Ivory Tower* with Madame Nazimova and *Baby* starring Joan Crawford are some of the best. Fifty some shows from this series have survived and can be found at archive.org/details/ArchOboler01, 2 and 3.

Archie Andrews

A distinctive whistle, repeated, followed by a window opening.

"Hi Archie, what do ya want?"

"Come out right away, Jughead. It's a matter of life and death!"

"Ah relax, Archie, Relaaaxxx."

What do you do when you are the head of a struggling comic book company devoted to superheroes? Why you just relax and come up with a new teenage star, quite ordinary,

with no superpowers whatsoever. Well except the unlikely ability to fascinate the two loveliest girls in town. Then you replace the pleasant Madam Satan in Pep Magazine with your newest creation and call him Archie. This goes so smashingly well that you give him his own magazine, give him his own radio show and finally go ahead and name your company after him. Simple enough.

So it was that Archie along with his pal Jughead the hungry, his arch-rival Reggie, his adored lady Veronica and his gal pal Betty, who wishes she was adored, arrived fully formed from the comics to radio in 1943.

Archie Comics is an odd company that has failed at everything it has ever tried that wasn't tied to Archie and his friends. Superhero comics, the boon of Marvel and DC, have repeatedly failed here. On the other hand all things Archie have succeeded admirably. In addition to the Archie, Jughead, Betty and Veronica comics, Archie's friends Josie and the Pussycats and Sabrina the Teenage Witch have had their own successful comics and TV series. The strange thing is that all of their products tend to share one common trait, mediocrity. The successful Archie and friends and the failed superheroes were both written and drawn moderately well, but with none of the genius you might expect from a company that specialized in comics and nothing else.

This trend continues in the Archie radio show. It is competent and nothing more and to be fair nothing less. The shows are mildly amusing and reasonably acted, but certainly don't measure up to the teen sitcoms like Our Miss Brooks and Henry Aldrich. What does stand out about the shows and the comic books is their sense of fun. Nothing has to make sense about them, but somehow you walk away from both experiences with a smile on your face a few minutes mysteriously, but happily missing from your life.

One interesting Archie program is a 1948 audition show. It is taken from a disk that was made to be played for potential sponsors for the show. Armed with this disk, the salesman would pitch the show to marketing representatives of major American companies. Since a series was sponsored by a single company, which covered the entire cost of airtime, salaries for everyone on the series, studio rental and everything else related to the show, the cost could be major portion of a company's advertising budget. The demonstration disk and the salesman had better be impressive to garner this level of commitment from a sponsor. In this case it worked. Kraft and others sponsored the Archie Andrews show sporadically for the next five years. The show that wowed them was an Andrews Family visit to a local restaurant that saw Archie's friends dropping by unexpectedly and no one being able to decide what they should order.

A personal favorite is the December 13, 1947 Christmas show. Christmas shopping was a gold mine for comedy shows. From Jack Benny trying to choose whether to buy shoe laces with metal or plastic tips for Don Wilson to Fibber and Molly McGees trips to the Bonton department store with customers elbow to elbow, the crush of holiday shopping was an annual favorite of many of the big sitcoms. For anyone who has ever worked in retail over the holiday season, the comedy has an especially biting edge as we sympathize with the poor floorwalkers and clerks as they try to cope with the zany situations that our intrepid heroes trust on them. Archie and his pals join in the fun as they descend on the poor floorwalker at Stacie's Department Store and give him a Christmas to remember, probably from a sanatorium.

You can find Archie and his gang in dozens of episodes at archive.org/details/ArchieAndrews.

Armed Forces Radio Service and Specials

Armed Forces Radio did an invaluable service for American soldiers serving their country across the world. From the artic tundra to the jungle islands of the Pacific, Armed Forces Radio beamed a bit of home to millions of weary GIs. Sitcoms, dramas and many programs created specifically for the boys made them think of better times and let them know that they were not forgotten. Along the way the Armed Forces Radio Transcription Unit also did an enormous service to old time radio collectors. They recorded thousands of radio shows for syndication to the hundreds of stations and navel vessels that made up this unique network in the farthest flung corners of the globe and thereby saved these shows for posterity. A healthy minority of the classic radio shows that have been handed down to us come from these transcription disks, in fact almost any program you hear that has the commercials excised exists because of this service.

In addition to broadcasting commercial-free versions of programs from Jack Benny, Bing Crosby and many more, the service also produced programs like *Command Performance*, *GI Jive* and *Mail Call*. More information on these shows can be under their individual entries. There are also a few holiday shows that are listed as Armed Forces Radio Specials on several disks and FTP sites. They tend to sound like *Command Performances*, but without the moniker. While none are available for free, archive.org/details/CommandPerformance should keep fans of the AFRS happy for many hours.

The Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club's web site has a wonderful set of three articles on the AFRS in the Solomon Islands written by Martin Hadlow at mwotrc.com/rr2006_12/mosquito.htm.

Armstrong of the S.B.I. (See Jack Armstrong, All American Boy)

The Armstrong Theater of Today

Girl: Oh you are awfully anxious to get away aren't you?

Boy: It's funny. Yesterday I didn't think I could stand another hour in this town, but today it doesn't seem quite so bad. I'm afraid I wasn't very polite last night.

After *Stars Over Hollywood* began garnering an audience for CBS in the generally bleak Saturday daytime schedule of the early forties, the network added *The Armstrong Theater of Today*. The name combined the sponsor, Armstrong Cork Company, and the idea of modern theater into a title that worked well enough to last from 1941 until 1954. The theater was generally Hollywood fluff where boy met girl or in more sophisticated episodes man met woman with occasional B grade movie stars.

The program opened with a few minute of news from George Bryon, The Armstrong News Reporter, before launching into the weekly melodrama. A live audience gave the proceedings an energetic air cheering our young man and his young love, while along the way the Armstrong Quaker Girl would pitch the product. The series was solid, relatively cheap entertainment for a Saturday midday, but next to the great theater programs of evening radio it pales. This is probably why only two or three show still exist.

Arnold Grimm's Daughter

Jealous Wife: But there had been something between them and he had promised to marry her!

Comforting Friend: Connie, there is nothing so cold as a love that has burned itself out. It is colder than the ashes of yesterday's fire.

From the legendary husband-wife producing team Ann and Frank Hummert, *Arnold Grimm's Daughter* was one of the minor soap operas of the late thirties and early forties. The series followed the tribulations of Constance, the daughter of the title, as she fought to make her marriage with Dal work even though their families disinherited them. As with many of the lesser soaps, time has robbed the series of any vitality it might have had and the one remaining episode is merely a novelty act.

The best thing to come from the series was the career of Betty Lou Gerson. She had moved to Chicago in 1935 as a young actress and this soap opera was her big break. After her run as Connie, she would become a feature player in radio programs like *Guiding Light*, *I Love Adventure* and *Mr. President*. The actress later appeared in bit roles in Hollywood films and as a guest on the occasional TV show. Gerson is best remembered today as the narrator for Disney's *Cinderella* and the voice of Cruella De Vil for the Disney film *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*.

The Art Gilmore Show

You know most everyone has some particular thing he likes to do, I like to collect stories to tell you over the radio. Lately I've been able to work my schedule around so I'd have the occasional long weekend off. That's when I jump in the car and make a trip somewhere sightseeing and story hunting.

The Art Gilmore Show, starring not surprisingly Art Gilmore, was an audition program for Langendorf bread. The idea behind the program was for Art to travel about the country and collect fascinating stories that he could relate to an interested listening public. But somewhere along the way the company decided the public just wasn't interested in the program and *The Art Gilmore Show* never made it past the audition stage.

This didn't have a negative impact on Art's career however. During his radio days he announced programs like the *Sears Radio Theater* and *Amos 'n Andy*. It was also the voice of Art Gilmore that introduced Herbert W. Armstrong and hawked the free religious literature on *The World of Tomorrow*. When the television age dawned, Gilmore was the announcer for the *Red Skelton Show* and narrated *Highway Patrol*. He also made a number of TV guest appearances on programs like *Dragnet* and the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. In fact Gilmore did so well as announcer, that wrote the book or least coauthored it with Glenn Y. Middleton. *Television and Radio Announcing, Revised Edition* can still be found for sale in alibris.com.

Arthur Godfrey

Let's face the facts my dear, you can't pick up the paper anymore without, gosh you don't have to pick up a paper to know it, everything is up, up, up, but there is one thing here that you perhaps didn't know, there is one protein rich food that has not increased in price in four years and that is Star Kissed Tuna Fish.

Arthur Godfrey owed his phenomenal success across the decades to his ability to chat with the listener like he was the only person Arthur was talking to and to convince that one listener to drink Lipton Tea and smoke a Chesterfield. If Arthur had told him to, the listener would have tried to do both at once while eating his bowl of tuna fish. Because of his relaxed persona and ability to communicate to the individual, his shows sound decades ahead of their time. Perhaps this is because so many radio and television hosts grew up with Arthur and naturally emulated him. Godfrey's influence on broadcasting is such that even today TV morning shows have been known look for a "Godfrey-like" host when they are planning a down home style show and personalities from overnight UFO fanatic Art Bell, to daytime host Regis Philbin to Carson sidekick Ed McMahon have been compared with him for their relaxed charm and abilities to sell any product in a low key.

The difference in style between the older radio hosts and Godfrey is best illustrated by listening to Major Bowes' *Original Amateur Hour* and then Godfrey's *Talent Scouts* which replaced the Major on CBS radio. Bowes sounds formal and stilted, rarely venturing away from the carefully scripted interactions that his contestants were required to memorize. Godfrey is casual as he chats with his talent scouts and the contestants. While there was clearly a script as Arthur asked leading questions, the questions and answers have a spontaneity to them that is lacking on the old show. The Godfrey humor is there as well as he after half a dozen tongue twisting names came his way on one *Talent Scouts* program, he asked a fellow named Dixon how he ever got on the program with that last name.

Arthur Godfrey Time was his prime vehicle. The series was a daily variety show that started Godfrey on his way to network stardom in 1945 and remarkably lasted until 1972 when old time radio was a distant memory. The program start time varied between 10 and 11 am across the years and it usually ran for either 30 or 60 minutes. While Arthur's monologues and his chats with his announcer and sidekick Tony Marvin, music director Archie Bleyer and others in his cast are the dominate feature of the program, performances by the show's fine band and its collection of singers, known as the Little Godfreys provide a pleasant breaks from the talk. The most famous of the Little Godfreys were pop crooners young Juluis La Rosa and veteran Frank Parker, Hawaiian hula dancer and singer Haleloke, the female quartet the Chordettes who often moved Arthur to tears with their lovely harmonies and the McGuire Sisters who became a part of the show after an appearance on *Talent Scouts*. The show's musicians were also quite talented with members of his band winning spots in nation magazine's listing of jazz all stars. The show was televised live in 1948 and eventually morphed into the Wednesday evening variety program *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends*. The show featured the same performers who appeared on the weekdays radio show.

The series is a pleasant listen. Godfrey's style is still entertaining, while some of his chats are quite dated, many will still bring a smile or a chuckle to your lips. The band has a pleasant light jazz sound and Arthur knew who to hire singers. *Arthur Godfrey Time*

always sported a fine young male pop vocalist and either a talented lady singer or female group. For the ukulele lovers in the group, Arthur himself plunked such a mean plink and sold so many that he is in the Ukulele Hall of Fame. Some favorites are Billy Holiday's appearance on the January 11, 1947 show and the Gene Autry guest shot October 8th, 1948 program. The thirtieth anniversary programs from late January 1964 are also must listens for Godfrey fans.

Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts was the CBS replacement for *Major Bowes' Amateur Hour* when the good Major decided to pack his bags and head elsewhere. To distinguish the new show from the old, the talent scout concept was added and the contestants weren't required to be amateurs. Letters flooded into the show from friends and relatives who knew a special someone with talent. Usually this was musical talent, but comedians, harmonic players and others also found their way onto the program. The letter writers, aka Talent Scouts, would chat with Godfrey and introduce the act. This allowed for a big buildup to each performance and the acts usually lived up to the billing. Since most were already professionals or at least on the verge, the sound was much different than the Bowes show where half the fun was waiting for inept performers to be gonged off the stage.

In many ways it was the radio predecessor to *American Idol* since the weekly winners gained national exposure on *Arthur Godfrey Time* for the rest of the week and very occasionally became regular guests on the show or even members of the cast. The program jumped to television in late 1948 and became an immediate hit. It was the number one show on TV in the 51-52 season, number two the next year and number three the year after that.

Oddly enough the show probably did as much for comedians as it did for singers. Mild mannered Wally Cox, his polar opposite Lenny Bruce and cutup Jonathon Winters all got their big breaks on the program and a young Don Knotts allegedly put in an appearance as well. On the musical front, Pat Boone, the Chordettes and the McGuire Sisters all became regulars on big Arthur Godfrey show after their appearances on *Talent Scouts*. Other contestants who did pretty well after an appearance on the show include Tony Bennett, Connie Francis, Rosemary Clooney and Patsy Cline.

Talent Scouts is easily the best of the "audience votes on the best performer" type shows. Godfrey's relaxed style and interactions with both the talent scouts and the performers make for solid entertainment themselves and the acts usually range from solid to excellent with the very occasional astounding. The most interesting of the available shows is the September 26, 1949 program where a hilarious Wally Cox is defeated by the lovely vocals of the all girl quartet, the Chordettes.

A (relatively) Brief Biography

That Arthur Godfrey ever made his way into primetime radio and then television is astounding. If his early years were any indication you would have expected Arthur to become a modestly successful businessman or spend a career in the armed forces. He was an industrious young man who spent two hitches in the armed forces before ever seeing the inside of a commercial radio station.

Godfrey was born in 1903 to sportswriter and horse expert Arthur and former society girl Kathryn. It must have been an interesting upbringing for young Arthur. His

father was a freethinker who claimed to be a grandson of the Vicoroy of India and his mother was a talented artist, singer and pianist who regretted that she never had a concert career. *Time Magazine* quoted Godfrey as saying, "She liked to cut portrait silhouettes, paint with water colors and bake fancy cakes and cookies, but cook you a decent meal? No!" He also recalled the times that she played the piano at three in the morning.

For the first ten years of Godfrey's life, the family lived in Manhattan and did reasonably on Arthur senior's salary. Somewhere along the line the automobile replaced the horse and all of Arthur seniors knowledge of horse became virtually useless. The family moved to the poor side of town and struggled to eat and pay the rent. When he was about twelve, Arthur began finding work to bring in sorely needed cash. The energetic young man got up early to work his paper route before school and worked in a bakery after school let out. His mother also worked hard to keep the family together and bread on the table. She played accompaniment to silent films and created little cottage industries to bring in money. You can read more about this talented, if eccentric woman in a book written by her daughters Jean and Kathy called *Genius in the Family*.

Unfortunately, Arthur had an argument with his debate coach and ran away from home when he was 14. After bumming around the country trying to find work, the young man joined the Navy as a radioman third class at age 17. It was in the service that he learned to play the ukulele and developed a taste for show business. Out of the Navy in 1924, he began working as a door to door salesman selling cemetery plots, but soon he tired of this existence and joined the Coast Guard.

While he was stationed in Baltimore, he found radio. According to *Time*, the redhead banjo player turned up at an amateur show on WFBR in Baltimore and eventually found a five dollar a show sponsor in a birdseed company. After resigning from the military, Godfrey moved to WRC in Washington DC. While he was there he had a horrific auto accident that changed his life. Laid up in the hospital for almost half a year, Arthur Godfrey began to listen to the radio. He discovered that all the announcers used a very formal style of speech that sounded like they were giving a lecture rather than chatting with another human being. He decided that he would use a relaxed style, talking to each listener as if he or she were the only one listening.

When he went back to work, he tried this new approach to announcing. It was an immediate hit with everyone but his bosses. Despite his high ratings, he was fired. Fortunately rival DC station WJSV scooped up the young host and he became just as popular on the new station. In fact he was so popular that he wrangled a network show from CBS. Unfortunately the show flopped badly and he was back to being a local announcer. He tried again in 1937, with two separate network shows, but both failed.

Eventually Arthur moved to WABC, the CBS affiliate in New York. He also became the announcer for Fred Allen, an experiment that lasted for six weeks. Godfrey wanted to be a star and Allen wasn't about to relinquish the spotlight. Finally he got his network break in an odd way. His 1945 coverage of the funeral procession of President Franklin Roosevelt caught the attention of the nation and soon *Arthur Godfrey Time* became a nationally broadcast variety show during the late morning hours. In addition to the host, the program featured a live band and a variety of musical performers who came to be known as the Little Godfreys.

The new program took a while to catch on, but finally the listenership became respectable and Chesterfield became the first sponsor. When Major Bowes packed up his

Original Amateur Hour, Lipton Tea took a chance on Godfrey in prime time with the replacement program, *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts*. The program was arguably better than the one it replaced and soon the new medium of television came calling. *Talent Scouts* was simulcast on radio and TV for the first time on December 6, 1948. It became an immediate hit, peaking at number one during the 51-52 season before *I love Lucy* arrived to bump everyone down a notch. After the success of *Talent Scouts*, *Arthur Godfrey and Friends* was a natural second show. It was based on Arthur's morning radio program and utilized the same cast. The programs were so successful that that spawned a short lived Arthur Godfrey Ukulele show and according to starpulse.com, Godfrey's radio and television programs accounted for 12 percent of CBS entire revenues at their peak.

Over time the popularity of the shows began to wane. Controversy over the on air firing of Little Godfrey Julies LaRosa, and the off air firings of bandleader Archie Bleyer and many of the Little Godfreys led to pointless feuds with newspapermen and the powerful Ed Sullivan and cost the series listeners and viewers. Two films *The Great Man* released in 1956 and the next year's *A Face in the Crowd*, both had *Citizen Kane* overtones as they demonized characters who appeared Godfrey-like at the very least. Even worse news followed for Godfrey. In 1959 cancer was found in one of his lungs. The veteran host retired from broadcasting while undergoing radiation treatments after having one lung removed.

Arthur Godfrey defied the disease and made a successful radio comeback. Often broadcasting from his comfortable ranch home, he continued the *Arthur Godfrey Time* radio show until 1972. Through the sixties he appeared in three movies and made several guest appearances on television. The legendary host passed away in 1983.

The LaRosa Incident

On October 19th, 1953 during a live radio broadcast, Arthur Godfrey asked his 23 year old singer Julius LaRosa for a rendition of "I'll Take Manhattan". After the song, Godfrey announced, "That was Julie's swan song. He goes out now as his own star, soon to be seen on his own programs, and I know that you wish him Godspeed same as I do." With those words LaRosa became the first man ever fired on the air over a major network and Arthur Godfrey destroyed two careers, his own and LaRosa's.

The seeds of the incident were sown when LaRosa missed a dance lesson that Godfrey had mandated for the entire cast. The young man had a family emergency and claimed to have told Godfrey that he couldn't attend the lesson. Valid reason or no, the boss suspended LaRosa from his show for a day by pinning a notice on the staff bulletin board. Feeling he was being treated unfairly, LaRosa hired an agent, Tommy Rockwell of General Artist. This was a move calculated to bring out the worst in Godfrey. All of the artists on the Arthur Godfrey show were represented by Godfrey's office and they were not to bring in outside representation under any circumstance.

Julius LaRosa had also signed with Cadence Records, run by LaRosa bandleader Archie Bleyer, and according to some accounts his fan mail had begun to out number the letters his boss received. Those with a darker view of Godfrey's personality credit LaRosa's growing independence and popularity as reasons that Godfrey decided the singer had to go. At any rate Arthur Godfrey went to CBS President Frank Stanton for

advice on how to deal with his young star. Stanton's recommendation was that since Godfrey had hired LaRosa on the air years before, he should fire him on the air.

Godfrey followed the advice and apparently thought his problems with LaRosa were over. It was a gross miscalculation. Julius and his agent held a press conference to defend the young man against his former boss who they perceived as a calculating tyrant. Godfrey responded with his own press conference where he said that LaRosa had "lost his humility." The phrase was instantly turned back on Godfrey who was perceived by many as never having had a shred of humility himself.

To add oil to the public relations fire, Godfrey fired his bandleader Archie Bleyer days later. Other firings followed including the popular ladies quartet the Chordettes and Hawaiian singer Haleloki. Ed Sullivan invited some of the fired performers onto his show and soon found himself embroiled in a feud with an angry Godfrey. Newspaper columnists Dorothy Kilgallen and Jack O'Brien also fought with the embattled host through the media as they took him to task for the firings.

With each new firing and feud, Arthur Godfrey's program lost listeners and viewers. *Arthur Godfrey's Talents Scouts* dropped from the third most watched television show in the 53-54 season to number eighteen the next year. The program slowly climbed back toward the top ten, but Godfrey's image was irreparably tainted. Two movies were released in the mid fifties that vilified him through fictional characters and he received more bad publicity when he buzzed a control tower in a fit of rage while flying one of his planes.

In retrospect it was a sad incident for everyone involved. No one benefited from either the firing or the controversy. Arthur Godfrey finished his career with his now modestly successful radio show *Arthur Godfrey Time* in 1972 after having made a remarkable comeback from cancer. His television success has now been widely forgotten with little recognition by CBS TV that he ever worked for them. Julius LaRosa became a New York DJ after his singing career fizzled, though he later found some success as a club singer. Most of the other performers who were fired faded away with the close of the fifties and the advent of rock and roll.

Live

It's the difference between watching gifted thespians bring the famed balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* to life before your eyes in a theater and seeing the dim echo on film. It's the difference between clapping along with the drumbeat at a live concert while your favorite singer croons and listening to the CD at home. It's the difference between kissing your loved one and looking at their picture. It's real, it's not Memorex.

There was a time when all network broadcasts were live. Through the radio days of the twenties, thirties and well into the forties, virtually everything on NBC and CBS was broadcast from a 'hot' microphone straight into your home. Without the net of recording, these shows had a feeling of theatrical vibrancy. No matter how well written the show or how well rehearsed, once the theme music swelled the cast was on stage for an entire nation and the actors' ability to perform live was all that mattered.

In 1946, Bing Crosby changed radio. Enthralled with the idea of recording weeks of shows at a time on reel to reel tape so that his radio schedule wouldn't interfere with his life, he decided he wanted to start transcribing his show. When NBC refused to allow

this, the crooner jumped to the struggling ABC where he and his tape recorded programs where welcomed with open arms. Over the next few years the other networks followed suit and began to allow recordings of their shows. As the fifties rolled on and radio ratings plummeted, more and more programs contained the announcement, "This program comes to you by transcription." As network revenue from radio waned and was redirected to television, disk jockey shows began to appear. A host or two spinning records was a cheap alternative to the expense of the casts, crew and live musician that even inexpensive soap operas required. Of course this was the future of radio. Recording, with the complicity of television, killed the radio star.

Early television was also generally live, but the classic sitcom *I Love Lucy* changed this in 1951. The show was shot using three 35 millimeter film cameras and the results were so much sharper and cleaner than any previous TV recordings that television embraced film. Soon virtually all television dramas and comedies were recorded.

So what is so special about 'live' entertainment? Partly it is the thrill of watching the tightrope walker and waiting for him to slip. Live bloopers are part of the joy of old time radio. Listening to Mary Livingston order "a chiss sweese sandwich" on the *Jack Benny Show* or Alice Faye momentarily forgetting how to say Indonesian and pronounce it Indo-nose-ian on the show she shared with hubby Phil Harris provides some of the biggest laughs on these sitcoms. Of course the costars, especially Phil, had a wonderful time kidding their spouses about these slip ups as the audience roared their approval.

Part of the 'live' experience was the knowledge that anything could happen. This was especially true on Arthur Godfrey's show. During the talent shows, the listener never knew if the performer would thrill them or sicken them and what host Godfrey would say in either case. On his daily morning show Godfrey was just as unpredictable. One morning he started to sing his way through a little tune and couldn't quite get the hang of it. Turning to his unsuspecting male vocalist, Arthur tells him to try out the song. The singer can't find the elusive melody either, so with a little gentle ribbing about who neither of them can get it right, Godfrey finally turns to his female singer Jeanette McDonald. She finally nails down the tune and everyone is happy. It is a silly moment, but a special one as the cast interacts and the audience laughs and applauds and a moment that would be impossible on a DJ show where the music is prerecorded.

This live feel is a good deal of the fun of listening to Arthur Godfrey. The man was a master host who let the fun flow from the stage through the 'ether' until it found its way into your home. As he wanders through commercials, chats with his cast and tells silly stories, you feel like you are back in the forties or fifties sitting with the audience and laughing along.

Tidbits

You can find Arthur Godfrey Time shows from the early fifties at the Paper Tape Archive, otrannex.com/papertapes/otr/index.htm .

The University of Virginia's website featuring WJSV, Washington DC's entire broadcast day from September 21, 1939 has the Godfrey hosted Sundial at xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s2/Radio/day/radio.html .

If you would like to see the affable pitchman in action, take a look at *Flying with Arthur Godfrey*, archive.org/details/Flyingwi1953 and archive.org/details/Flyingwi1953_2. This fifty minute film was an infomercial for the airline industry and Eastern Airlines in particular that allowed Godfrey to stretch his wings as a pitchman for one of his favorite hobbies. Arthur owned two planes of his own and loved to chat about them on his broadcast. One more than one occasion he personally flew a guest in to appear on his broadcast and then piloted them home after the show.

Those with yen to search Youtube can find clips of several Godfrey TV shows, especially those featuring the McGuire Sister, and the VHS of A&E's Biography show on Arthur Godfrey is available from Amazon.com.

Artie Shaw's Big Band Remotes

In the late thirties, radio networks had many hours to fill and were always looking for ways to add prestige to their name. One of the easiest ways to do both was to send an announcer and an engineer to a ballroom or jazz club and put one of the famed jazzmen and his band on the air across the country. By this time Benny Goodman, Count Basie and Duke Ellington had become household names in the musical style that had taken America by storm. If the live remotes benefited the networks, they may have helped the jazz bands even more. The big time band leaders knew that exposure to a national audience was vital to their success, so they were often willing to work for a reasonable stipend. The knowledge they were still collecting their fees from whatever club they were playing for and that both record plays on the nations 300,000 jukeboxes and individuals record sales would both surge skyward because of the broadcasts made radio money less important.

The equal of any musician and in some eyes the best of the jazz players, legendary clarinetist and band leader Artie Shaw was a fixture on CBS during this time. While he did band remotes from many hotels and ballrooms, his primary haunt was the Blue Room of New York Lincoln Hotel where he and the band broadcast a series for Old Gold Cigarettes in 1938 and 39. Artie was also the band leader and an actor on the 1940-41 season of Burns and Allen. The other place you will hear the name Artie Shaw in old time radio is as the punch line to jokes about marriage. The jazzman loved often and none too well, going through eight wives including Lana Turner and Ava Gardner.

A dozen or so shows have been handed down to us from Shaw's remotes in the late thirties and early forties. Most are in good shape and are should please jazz fans. They feature up tempo tunes dominated by swinging brass and solid female vocalists. You can find a National Public Radio interview with Artie Shaw at npr.org/programs/morning/features/2002/mar/shaw/ and an Artie Shaw broadcast at radiolovers.com/pages/artieshaw.htm.

At Ease

A pleasant sounding fifteen minutes of uninterrupted light orchestral music from the Armed Forces Radio Orchestra, *At Ease* debuted in 1944. Dedicated to playing "America's Folk Songs of Tomorrow" as the unnamed announcer put it, the selections were usually gentle versions of pop standards. The series lasted for hundreds of transcribed shows under the baton of orchestra founder Meredith Wilson. Guitarist Les

Paul was a featured player and Martha Mears handled the vocals. Eventually other conductors including Frank De Vol, Percy Faith and Alvino Rey took over the program sometimes using the Armed Forces Radio Orchestra and sometime their own bands. Close to a dozen programs are in circulation and can be found on compilations of either musical shows or Armed Forces Radio series.

At Home With The Kirkwoods

Jack: Don't tell me that nitwit next door is going to start practicing again!

Lil: Why not he's from a very musical family

Jack: Haha, His old man got punched on the nose by Tommy Dorsey once so he comes from a musical family?

The one available program in this series is the 1947 audition that spawned a regional series on ABC for the raspy voice, madcap comic Jack Kirkwood and his wife Lillian Leigh. The audition is quite entertaining as the veteran comic meets the odder members of his family and his home town. Think of *At Home with the Kirkwoods* as *Fibber McGee* with an attitude.

Kirkwood was a former vaudevillian who joined the staff of San Francisco's KFRC in the mid-thirties. As the forties dawned, Kirkwood began to star in a series of short-lived network comedies. He also appeared on shows like *Fibber McGee and Molly* and *Ozzie and Harriet*, finally becoming a regular on Edgar Bergen's show in his most famous role as Professor Kirkwood. You can find out more about him in the *Jack Kirkwood Show* entry.

While *At Home With the Kirkwoods* isn't available for free download from the internet you can find a *Jack Kirkwood Show*, which sounds very similar, along with four other comedic Jacks on Episode 43 of the excellent *Glowing Dial* internet radio show at glowingdial.com/net43_detail.htm. While you are there look through past shows, you will find dozens of great old time radio programs and expert commentary from Big John and Steve.

Atlantic Spotlight

British Announcer: Leslie Mitchell appearing through the courtesy of British Movietone News is standing by to turn on the London end of the Spotlight... Suddenly the announcer is gone and we hear the crackle of dead air.

American Announcer fading up: Well this is Ben Grauer in New York calling Leslie Mitchell in London (long pause) Hello London?

Adding to the inherent dangers of live broadcasting, NBC and BBC teamed up for an experiment in live multi-continent broadcasting in January of 1944. The program, simulcast on both networks, featured a host in America and one in England and acts from both countries. The countries tried to one up each other with talent in the same area, so if English comics Flanagan and Allen did their routine, America's Red Skelton would answer with one of his own. There were also two orchestras and many worried engineers contemplating the thousands of miles their signal had to travel via shortwave. The shows

usually went smoothly with only minor delays due to the time sound took to travel the ocean. On the rare occasions the shortwave link gave way due to atmospheric conditions, the host in the receiving country was left scrambling to avoid dead air.

If *Atlantic Spotlight* was prone to technical glitches, it was also seen by some as a sign of both better times and of better broadcasts to come. America and Britain had been fighting the Axis together for two years and they were making strides toward victory and peace. Hitler had been routed from Africa and Italy had surrendered to the Allies. On the Pacific front the US was driving the Japanese back to the land of the setting sun island by island. The series was also a technological achievement that many thought would be repeated broadly after the war. The best entertainment of both cultures could be shared across the networks and listeners on both sides the “pond” would rich for the shared experience. Of course this didn’t happen, but it was a fine idea.

The October 21, 1944 broadcast is the only *Atlantic Spotlight* that can still be heard. For some reason it features almost exclusively British talent and sounds something like the famed Armed Forces variety show *Command Performance* with an accent.

Attorney at Law

Shrill of police sirens and a voice asking: Hey who's Terry Regan around here?
Package of diphtheria doctoid for him.
Regan: Right here Doctor, thank you we'll need all we can get!

Adventure above the high seas lies behind the innocuous title *Attorney at Law*. In the one surviving show, Lawyer Terry Regan and crew fly an experimental aircraft to get vaccine to a ship threatened by the deadly disease diphtheria. Along the way danger and betrayal rear their plot convoluting heads in this 1938 summer replacement show for *Fibber McGee and Molly* and Johnson's Wax. Oddly enough this half hour of adventure was soap opera sequel for the attorney. During the first six months of 1938, *Attorney at Law* had been a fifteen minute midday drama for the housewives starring Jim Ameche. It was also sponsored by Johnson's Wax and apparently when the time came to find a summer show to fill the Fibber and Molly timeslot, someone had the idea of giving Terry Regan a facelift.

The new Terry was portrayed by actor Henry Hunter who was in the midst of a brief movie career for Universal pictures. He was generally one of the actors who appeared toward the end of the credits on B movies, though he did work with the great Lionel Barrymore in the picture *Calling Dr. Kildare*. Henry disappeared from the screen until television revived his career in 1955. He then spent 17 years appearing as the doctor, the minister or the mayor on single episodes of shows ranging from *Wagon Train* to *Leave it to Beaver* to *Get Smart*.

The surviving episode of *Attorney at Law* is called *The Case of the Asia Express*. Dating from June 16, 1938, it is an exciting yarn, but the first ten minutes crackle with static and make the listening a little difficult.

Attorney for Defense

The man who can detect the weak point in the witnesses testimony and lead him gently into the trap and spring it relentlessly... there you have the artist.

In May 1944, two thirds of the trio of adventures on *I Love a Mystery*, Michael Raffetto and Barton Yarborough, decided they needed more money. The show's creator Carlton Morse said no and suddenly the parts of Jack and Doc had to be recast. Raffetto needed the money to cover his alimony payments and he was already angry that he wasn't asked to play Jack in the film series of *I Love a Mystery* so he quit and his pal Yarborough did the same. Instead of having more income Raffetto now had less, so he went looking for work. Ironically some of the extra cash came from Carlton Morse. Micheal Raffetto's biggest weekly paycheck came from playing Paul Barbour in Morse' famed soap *One Man's Family* and now he began to write and occasionally direct episodes of the series.

Still looking for more money and hoping to help his buddy Barton Yarborough, Raffetto tried other projects including a series for C and F Radio Productions called *Attorney for Defense*. He played a hard living bachelor with a heart of tarnished silver who solved mysteries with his reluctant assistant James, played by Yarborough, and houseboy Fong. The show never made it past the audition stage. That audition program is still around and it makes for an oddly enjoyable half-hour. Raffetto and Yarborough have great chemistry and they do a good job of carrying the mediocre script. Fans of Carlton Morse' blood and thunder serials will want to hunt this one down.

August 10, 1945

H.V Kaltenborn: Good morning everybody. We are here in the NBC newsroom with the bulletins coming in constantly on Japan's surrender offer and with every minute that passes it seems more certain that the offer is definite and that there is a nine out of ten chance that it will be accepted.

As news began breaking that Japan might be ready to surrender, someone at WEAF decided that this might be good time to record the broadcast. From eleven in the morning until seven at night, the recording continued preserving not only newscasts but also music, sports and an entire afternoon of soap operas. Like the September 21, 1939 broadcast day from WJSV, this is an important recording because it preserves programs like game show *Correction, Please* and Irna Phillips' *Today's Children and Woman in White*. These lesser known shows have rarely been preserved and the program that aired on an extended recording of a broadcast day is sometimes the only surviving episode of that entire series.

It is interesting to simply listen to this broadcast in its entirety. First we hear H.V. Kaltenborn and other news commentators talking about the surrender offer and whether Japanese Emperor Hirohito would be allowed to remain the country's ruler before the news gives way to the morning soap operas. Then come the noon news and gossip shows and a bit of music to finish the hour. At one o'clock its time for afternoon talker Mary Margaret McBride who chats with flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker and his wife in a bit fortuitous of scheduling. Eddie is there to talk about a film, but the talk naturally turns to the possibility of Japanese surrender.

After the *News of the World*, comes 2pm's *The General Mills Hour*. What makes this hour of soap operas amazing is that the first three fifteen minute programs were all written by the same woman, Irna Phillips. Called the Mother of Soap Operas, she would adapt *Guiding Light*, which leads off this hour, to television where it would become the world's longest running soap opera. She also created *As the World Turns* and *Days of Our Lives* which continue to be stalwarts of daytime television to this day.

Not all the scripts were completely different as Stud Terkel reminisced in an interview with Bob Edwards, "The *Guiding Light* was about a young minister and his trials and tribulations. *Woman in White*, as you can guess from the name, was about a nurse, same program! But they all were the same scripts; so I'd get killed on *Woman in White*, as I deserved, before the second commercial! I'd get killed ... then I'd find myself on *Guiding Light* - same role!"

Along with occasional newbreaks, the soaps continue at three with the Ivory vehicle *A Woman in America*, Frank and Anne Hummert's classic soap *Ma Perkin's*, Elaine Carrington's *Pepper Young's Family*, back to Irna Phillips for *The Right to Happiness*. I hope you aren't soap operaed out yet, as four pm is Hummert Hour starting with the show Bob and Ray loved to spoof, *Mary Noble Backstage Wife* and continuing with *Stella Dallas*, *Lorenzo Jones* and *Young Widder Brown*. Husband and wife team Frank and Anne Hummer are credited with helping to create the soap and through their long careers as writer/producers put over one hundred shows on the air covering every imaginable genre. Unlike Irna Phillips, the Hummerts tended to delegate almost all of the actual writing of their shows to others. More melodrama follows in the five o'clock hour. Elaine Carrington is back to bring us *When a Girl Marries*, then *Portia Faces Life* and she really did go to jail. Two more Hummert vehicles follow aimed partly at men driving home from work, *Just Plain Bill* and *Front Page Farrell*.

Six o'clock comes and with it blessed deliverance from soap operas. News from Lyle Van and Lowell Thomas and Bill Stern's sports sandwich a program of music. Speculation continues about Japan's surrender as it would for days until the official VJ Day on August 15th. At seven the continuous recording ends, but City Service Petroleum Products *Highways of Melody* and the game show *Correction Please* have also been preserved if you feel like more radio.

Listening to this eight hour recording gives a different perspective on old time radio. Most of what we think of as classic radio comes from the primetime shows, the great comedies like Jack Benny's show or the dramas like Lux, however most forties and fifties radio wasn't like that. How many folks really listened to sixteen soap operas in a row or the dull musical interludes used to fill time after news casts? This probably explains why only a small fraction of what was broadcast has been handed down to us. Fortunately most of that "fraction" that was preserved is the wheat of radio, the great programs, and most of the chaff has been blown away by time.

More information on VJ Day and a seventeen and half minute "sound montage" of VJ day broadcasts can be found at otr.com/vj.html. You can also download hundreds of World War Two news broadcasts including several from VJ day at archive.org/details/worldwarIInewsOTRKIBM. The WJSV broadcast day is at archive.org/details/CompleteBroadcastDay. The Stud Terkel quote comes from Charlie Summer's fine site blogs.oldradio.net/ where he has many interesting commentaries and streaming old time radio shows.

Aunt Jemima

Jemima: Ah that's right children clap your hands. Clap your hands and be glad you can raise your voices in such a song.

If *Amos n Andy* comes across as a racially insensitive, than to paraphrase Al Jolson "You ain't heard nothing yet." *Aunt Jemima* begins and ends each four and half minute program with a minute long pitch for her pancake mix in a broadly burlesqued black accent. In between these bookend commercials a white choir attempts to sing "black songs" and Aunt Jemima does another pitch for her product. So overall this four and half minute "radio program" features almost three minutes of commercials and a shade over a minute and a half of pathetic singing. Even daytime soaps and serials like *Little Orphan Annie* with their seemingly eternal sponsor pitches had more entertainment than commercial! Give this show a miss unless you want to see just how low radio could go. If you still have the urge, the fifteen minute audition show and 18 five minute programs can be found at [archive.org/details/Aunt_Jemima](http://www.archive.org/details/Aunt_Jemima).

Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories

Doctor: Miss Conner why did you tell Lynn her father died of insanity?

Miss Conner: I... I don't know.

Doctor: I want the truth, you see I found out last night that he died of tuberculosis.

Aunt Jenny was the rarest of radio soap opera, a melodrama with a new plot each week. Virtually every other program of this type featured plot lines that extended for weeks or even years at a time. The lead actor and the supporting cast would cap and recap the current dramatic twist with the writer using clever ruses that went nowhere to disguise the fact that the plot moved at a snail's pace. Aunt Jenny on the other hand wasn't involved in her show's plots at all. She pitched her Spry Shortning and gave recipes that required Spry at the end of every broadcast, but left the rest of the program to her announcer and the actors' playing their parts in the week's five part drama.

Astoundingly this worked well enough for *Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories* to be a part of CBS radio from 1937 until classic radio creaked to the retirement home in 1956. One of the reasons was that Spry wasn't shy about promoting their product, their radio star or their radio show. Through the forties and fifties, many of the major ladies magazines carried Spry recipes along with a photo of a smiling Edith Spencer who played Aunt Jenny on the radio show. She urged all of the cooks to use Spry and of course her appearance reminded the reader to listen to her daily radio program. This clever use of advertising kept listener's returning to the radio show and, dare I say, the product moving spryly from the shelves.

The one readily available show which departs from soap's standards and practices by having a happy ending can be found as part of WJSV's Broadcast Day,

<http://www.archive.org/details/CompleteBroadcastDay>. If you would like to read more about soap operas try the soap opera forum of The Original Old Time Radio BBS at oldtime.us/phpBB/viewforum.php?=&f=9.

Aunt Mary

Max if you ever see me letting myself in for a catastrophe, stop me please.
I'll try Mr. Cromwell but if you'll remember my efforts along that line were somewhat unpopular...

If necessary ... beat me over the head with some blunt instrument.

Aunt Mary was a western lady who entertained western ladies. The show aired across NBC's western network through most of the forties and Mary Lane lived on a farm in the outposts of fictional Wakefield, California with her nice Peggy and Lefty, the hired hand. Thanks to the western setting and solid descriptions of farm life, this soap opera sported a relaxed style and a touch of humor.

The Old Time Radio Research Group has cataloged hundreds of shows and may someday release them to archive.org as they do with many shows. For now only a few episodes of *Aunt Mary* or *The Story of Aunt Mary* as it is sometimes called are available through old time radio download sites and on variety disks.

Author Meets the Critics

Mr. Maloney on Ring Lardner: We all know that sports writers are the lowest form of animal life there is.

Bill Veeck: Let's be a little careful, Mr. Maloney. Mr. Lardner was a very close friend of my father and spent a great deal of time in our house so let's confine ourselves to the facts for a change.

Recipe: Take a host who enjoys spicy dialogue and add two critics with diametrical opposing views on a work of literature. Bring to a boil for fifteen minutes of 'discussion'. Add the author, already well heated from listening to his work dissected. Stand well back from the pot.

Live and unrehearsed with natural enemies staring at each other from opposing microphones, *Author Meets the Critics* was a show unlike any other in radio. The critics usually traded clever and occasionally not so clever bards, before the long suffering author came to the microphone. After hearing his work dissected for the first half of the show, he was usually ready to lash out at the offending parties. The comments often turned personal and sometimes the moderator had to remind the speaker that he was on the air. In many ways it was a predecessor to modern talk radio sans the phone calls.

The series often moved beyond the standard works of literature into politics and popular culture. Guest critics included Norman Thomas, head of the Socialist Party of America, author James Michener and Merle Miller the editor of *Harper's Magazine*. They argued over works by folks like Pearl Buck, Norman Vincent Pearl and reformed former top American Communist Benjamin Gitlow.

The program was the brainchild of young lawyer Martin Stone. Looking for a way to make book review shows more exciting he hit upon the idea of having several people chat about the book. According to *Time Magazine*, NBC noticed his show on a small Albany radio station and put him on the air over WGY, Schenectady in 1940. After

six years. Stone's baby made the jump to New York City radio. As the show was garnering new listeners and network attention, the nation asked for his services and Martin joined the Navy. *Author Meets the Critics* carried on in his absence. One high spot during Stone's military experience was when he met fellow lawyer Hal Schaffel. Martin and Hal became fast friends and Schaffel would eventually help produce the book review program and others with Stone across decades of friendship.

After a brief run on Mutual's airwaves, NBC decided to add *Author Meets the Critics* to its afternoon lineup in 1947. Not much changed when the show went national, veteran newsman and radio host John K. M. McCaffrey continued as the show's moderator and the program continued to draw a strong cross section of authors and critics from the New York scene. It was well received critically and won a Peabody Award in 1949.

Author Meets the Critics also had a checkered television run using the same basic format as the radio show. The show started on NBC in 1948, jumped to ABC in 1949, came back to NBC in 1950 and finally to the Dumont network in 1952. While Martin Stone was finding networks for the telecasts of his first love, he and buddy Hal Schaffel where also producing *Howdy Doody Time*, *The Gabby Hayes Show* and other TV series.

If you enjoy talk radio, you should like this series. The guests are usually highly intelligent and highly opinionated which makes for both educational and amusing programs. Some of the discussions are quite dated, but even these make for an interesting view of history. Forty eight shows from the series can be purchased from MP3 disk sellers, though only the baseball show is available for free. It can be found at vintageradioplace.com/archive.html in the *Baseball Begins* broadcast.

Author, Author

Ogden Nash: Our drama has an unexpected ending and that's were our four authors come in. Their part of the game is to create extemporaneously a logical beginning to explain why a man should have the nerve to offer one dollar for a \$2000 watch and why the jeweler should have the geniality to accept it.

Satirical wordsmith Sidney Joseph Perelman tried many things. Best remembered for his work as the laugh inducer of the *New Yorker*, he helped write scripts for the Marx Brothers, penned Broadway plays and co-authored a book with Ogden Nash. Least remembered is his stint as host of the 'invent a mystery on the spot' radio show *Author, Author*. Along with permanent guest hosts Ellery Queen, Perelman welcomed New York literati like Dorothy Parker and Heywood Broun to this 1937 summer show over the Mutual network.

The show was successful enough to make it into the regular Mutual lineup in 1939, but with one important change. S.J. Perelman departed in favor of fellow New York humorist Ogden Nash. The cousins Fredric Dannay and Manfred Lee better known by their writing non de plume Ellery Queen remained on the program. Apparently they enjoyed radio and the feeling was mutual, on June 18, 1939 their popular detective made his radio debut in the *Adventures of Ellery Queen* over CBS. New host Nash also dabbled with radio throughout his career and enjoyed listening. He made guest appearances on

Information, Please and other radio shows and once favorably compared *Vic and Sade* writer Paul Rymer to Mark Twain.

Author, Author's premise was that listeners would send in the kernel of a mysterious situation which Ellery Queen and the guests of the week would spin into short mystery then and there. The listener scenario might ask why the owner of a shop would sell a valuable watch to a bum for two dollars? The answers range from a plebian suggestion about recognizing the old fellow as a friend to a kidnapping scenario ripped from the yellow pages of a pulp thriller.

At least two shows have survived and it is fun to listen to the writers attempt to create mysteries as they go along. Along the way they jokingly pick each other plots apart and generally enjoy themselves. While none of these shows are available for free, assorted Ellery Queen broadcasts can be found at archive.org/details/ElleryQueen.

Author's Playhouse

He's gonna ride down here to Yellow Hammer and give the kids of this town the biggest crying doll and little giant boy's tool chest blowout that was ever seen... How's he to know there ain't a single kid in this town?

The author's the thing. Some dramatic series used Hollywood or Broadway glamour to garner attention and others, such as *Suspense* and *X minus 1*, tried to attract genre fans. *Author's Playhouse* used the greats and near greats of literature as its allure. Each week a short story from the pen of a classic scribe or a modern writer was featured on this half hour anthology series. The choice of short stories was a wise one. Half hour adaptations of movies or novels always feel rushed, a sort of Cliff's Audio Notes version of a play. The short stories however fit neatly into the thirty minute format and move at a relaxed yet purposeful pace.

The show did reasonably well enjoying a run from 1941 to 1945. The NBC series was based out of Chicago and used local radio actors to good effect. The performances are uniformly solid as you would expect from radio veterans and the adaptations capture the spirit of the story. The plays cover the literary spectrum from action to romance to science fiction, so there should be something for everyone in this series. My favorites are the classics like O. Henry's *Christmas by Injunction* and H.G. Wells' *The Country of the Blind* which hold up better than some of the then modern short stories that were also used. Eighteen episodes of *Author's Playhouse* can be found at archive.org/details/AuthorsPlayhouse.

The Avenger

Fran: Say Jim what's this I hear about you arranging to have a friend of yours appear on the trapeze for the matinee...

Avenger: Well Fern It's kind of a secret, I wonder if I should trust you with it?

Fern: I'll never forgive you if you don't!

Avenger: The Great Gilberto who will perform this afternoon is yours truly.

From the pen of Walter Gibson, author of *The Shadow*, comes a shadow of *The Shadow*. *The Avenger* of the title had a telepathic indicator to read men's minds and a

diffusion capsule to cloud their vision. He was a sort of mechanical Shadow who achieved the same effect with his gadgets as the better written dark hero did with his mental powers. The crime fighting bio-chemist also had an assistant in the shapely form of Fern who was the only living soul who knew his secret identity. If you are beginning to suspect that this wasn't an overly original series, you would make a fine detective.

Interestingly both *The Shadow* and *The Avenger* had magazines from Street and Smith Publications, however while the former's radio show stayed somewhat close to the printed word, the later's changed dramatically. In *The Avenger* magazine, which ran from 1939 to 1943, our hero was a *Doc Savage* style adventurer who used scientific gadgets and a gaggle of companions to outwit evil masterminds. On the radio his companions and most of his mechanical gadgets were swept away in the false hope that a Shadow clone would attract a greater market. Since the syndicated series starring James Monks only lasted for 26 episodes during the 1945-46 radio season, *The Avenger* might have been better off staying with his roots.

As you would expect, this series comes off as a second rate copy of *The Shadow*. Fans of the genre will find some enjoyment here, but others will likely want to listen to the original and ignore the imitation. Archive.org has nine of the twenty six original shows at archive.org/details/otr_avenger.